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3392 AD
GRAPHIC INDIA
ISSUE 1
DASGUPTA/ABHISHEK

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

RAMAYAN 3392 AD

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DEEPAK CHOPRA & SHEKHAR KAPUR PRESENT

RAMAYAN 3392 AD

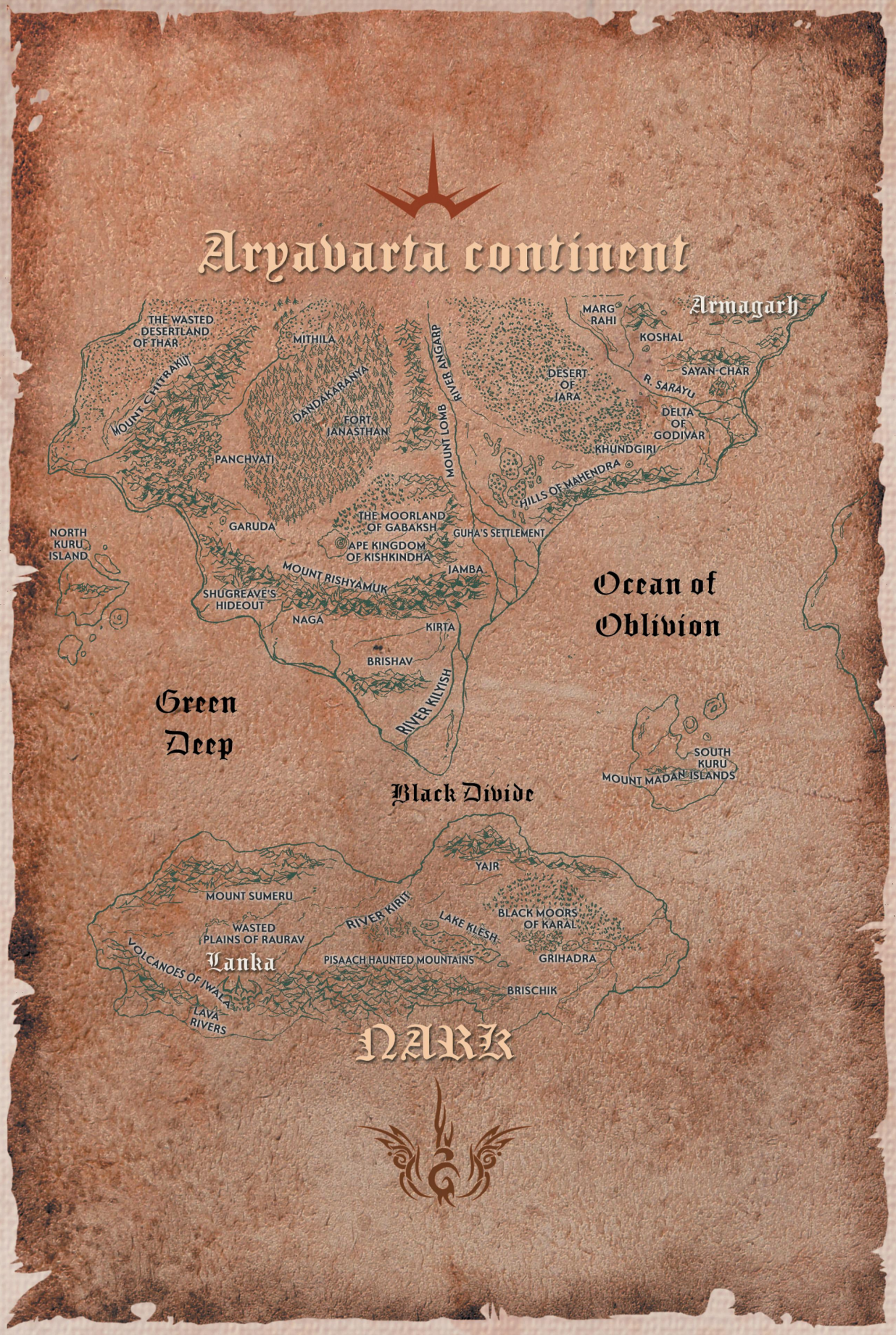
RAMAYAN 3392 A.D. is a re-imagining of one of the greatest myths ever told – the Indian epic RAMAYANA. As is the original, created over 5,000 years ago, ours is a story of mystery, magic, intrigue, adventure, heroism, courage, betrayal, fall-from-grace, and redemption. It embodies the eternal themes common to all great mythologies – the juxtaposition and inevitable balance between the sacred and the profane, the divine and diabolical, the saint and sinner; the redemptive power of unconditional love; the corruptive force of forbidden lust; triumph in the face of tragedy; life instinct and death instinct.

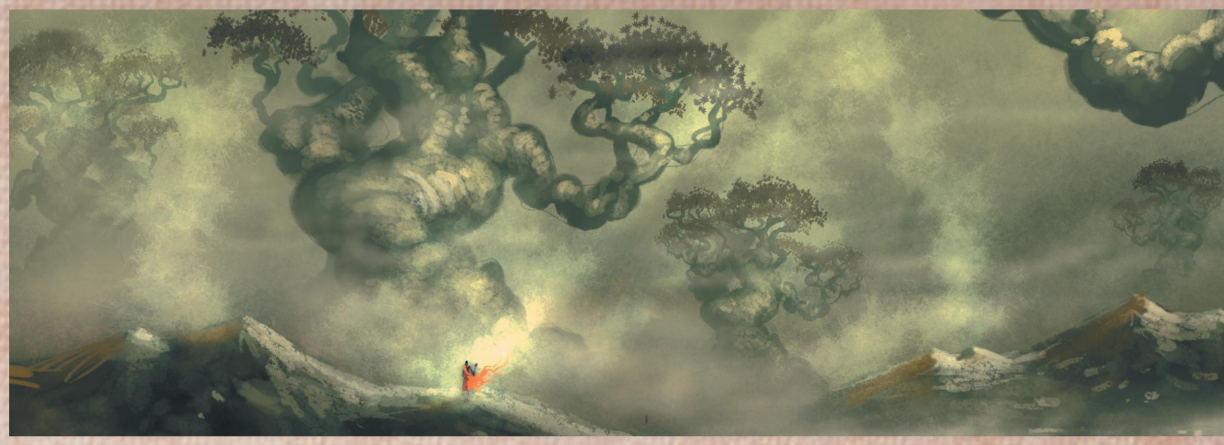
This new tale, inspired by the original Ramayan, is not meant to replace the original but instead to showcase just how timeless it is, how even today its themes continue to give meaning to life, create a cultural mindset, forge an idealist vision to which to aspire, serve as a bridge from what is to what could be, allay collective anxieties, and fuel collective desires and a collective imagination.

Ours is not a re-telling of Ramayan but a symbolic representation of similar mythical symbols that are meant to be understood in the contextual framework of a cross-cultural post-modern, multi-ethnic, global society. From time to time, new mythologies spark the imagination of the collective consciousness and lay the ground for the telling of a story that has such impact that it influences the behavior, the values, and the codes of morality of an entire civilization. We hope that RAMAYAN 3392 A.D. will ignite a new interest in mythology and nurture the deepest longings and aspirations for achievement, adventure and the desire to accomplish grand and wondrous things. For it is time.

Deepak Chopra

Shekhar Kapur





My name is Vishwamitra and I will be your guide for now. In the course of this tale, you will come to know me. But first come to know this land.

As we sail upstream on the river of time, we will come to the shores of distant lands. Far ahead in the mists of our future we will arrive in a world, surviving holocaust, an apocalyptic war that once destroyed the atmosphere and ecology. Still, life has found its way and evolution has taken another turn.

Various creatures, anthropomorphic beings, and intelligent life forms thriving and marching ahead the path of evolution populate this new world. Geography has changed the planet's complexion, a singular land forging two separate continents: Aryavarta and Nark. The greater continent Aryavarta is populated by various intelligent anthropomorphic races like the ape-men 'Vanaras,' the bird-men 'Garudas,' bear-men 'Bhalus,' the bovine people 'Brishavs,' and finally the very last remains of the human race. The humans of this age are far evolved, and they hold their last bastion in the land of Armagarh, situated in the North east of Aryavarta. Armagarh boasts a superior technology and lifestyle since it is the only land blessed by the light of sun, enabled by a futuristic marvel, a reactor 'Shakti Kundali' that emits an energy beam that cuts through the noxious cloud cover that enwraps the planet. In these war torn times, Armagarh breeds its own protectors, the finest of warriors, the Kshatriyas, matchless in martial supremacy and unparalleled in courage.

To their extreme south, the polar opposite in every sense, is Nark, a dark continent filled with myriad savage races called Asuras. Ravan, a monstrous and enigmatic being, spawn of the Apocalypse, rules the whole continent. The ambition of this Dark Lord now threatens Aryavarta too, as his Asura legions march forth spreading his virulent conquest. Ravan desires to bring the whole world into his iron grip, but the free willed races of Aryavarta are not going to give up without the most bitter of fights. Still, Ravan's influence grows, as nothing can bring all the races of Aryavarta together. Until…

ARMAGARH, THE SPLENDOR OF HUMAN EXCELLENCE. SITUATED IN THE NORTH EAST OF ARYAVARTA. IN AN AGE OF SHADOWS AND DARKNESS, THIS GREAT CITY IS LIKE A SHINING LANCE.

A LANCE THAT TEARS THROUGH THE NOXIOUS CLOUDS THAT COVER THE WORLD AND BRING THE GLORIOUS SUNLIGHT TO ITS REALM.

BUT WHERE THERE IS LIGHT, DARKNESS ALWAYS LURKS IN THE CORNERS.

THREE WEEKS AGO WE LOST OUR OUTPOST IN THE VALLEY OF SAYAN-CHAR. THE ASURA CONQUEST IS GROWING MORE AMBITIOUS BY THE DAY. OUR ARMIES WERE WIPED OUT COMPLETELY.

"WE WILL BE SENDING ANOTHER AKSHAUHINI*, LED BY SOME OF OUR FINEST KSHATRIYA WARRIORS, TO RECLAIM THE TERRITORY. SAYAN CHAR IS NOT TO BE COMPROMISED.

"THE SOUTHERN OUTPOST, KHUNDGIRI IS STILL UNDER ATTACK, BUT WITH A FRESH REINFORCEMENT OF TWO AKSHAUHINIS, THEY ARE HOLDING OFF WELL. OUR PORTS ALONG THE BANK OF SARAYU ARE SECURE.

*A LARGE UNIT OF ARMAGARHIAN TROOPS.

"A GROUP OF ARMAGARHIAN *SCOUTS* REPORTED A ***MASSIVE*** CONGREGATION OF ASURAS IN THE SOUTH OF THE CHITRAKUT RANGES. THIS IS FOOTAGE TRANSMITTED BY THE TEAM BEFORE THEY WERE DISCOVERED.

"WE BELIEVE IT IS *LORD RAVAN* HIMSELF. THIS IS ALARMING. WE MUST STRENGTHEN OUR OUTPOSTS."

I HOPE THE COUNCIL WILL AGREE WITH ME. IT'S ***TIME*** TO DEPLOY *YOUNG KSHATRIYAS* TO THE COLONIES. THEY ARE, AFTER ALL, OUR BEST WARRIORS.

WHAT SAY YOU, MAHARAJ DASHRATH?

I SUGGEST WE CONTACT THE *OTHER KINGDOMS* OF *ARYAVARTA*. THE ASURA MENACE *THREATENS* TO DEVASTATE OUR TRADE ROUTES AND MINES. IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE THEY'RE RIGHT OUTSIDE THESE WALLS.

WE *CANNOT* FIGHT THEM ALONE.

WHAT?! I STRONGLY PROTEST AGAINST THIS. WE MUST MAINTAIN OUR *RACIAL SUPREMACY*. WE CANNOT *BEG* FOR ASSISTANCE FROM *HALF-BEAST CREATURES*.

I *DISAGREE*, AND I THINK THE *MAJORITY* OF COUNCILORS AND SUB-COUNCILORS WILL AGREE.

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, COUNCILOR KAIKEYI, I DISAGREE. NOT EVEN A YEAR AGO, *KING BAALI* OF *KISHKINDA* THE *APE KINGDOM* OF THE SOUTH, DEFEATED A WHOLE ARMADA OF ASURA INVADERS. IT IS RUMORED THAT THEY TOO WERE LED BY LORD RAVAN HIMSELF.

NOW CONSIDER SUCH A POWERFUL NATION UNITED WITH ARMAGARH...

ENOUGH. WE SHALL DECIDE LATER IF WE NEED TO ALLY OUR FORCES WITH THE OTHER RACES OF ARYAVARTA. MEANWHILE FRESH BATCHES OF KSHATRIYA WARRIORS WILL BE SENT TO THE TROUBLED SETTLEMENTS TOMORROW.

AND IN THIS NEW BATCH I WILL INCLUDE MY FOUR SONS...

DO YOU THINK YOU ARE UP TO IT, BLUE BOY? ONE WRONG MOVE AND IT'S A LONG WAY DOWN TO THE SHAKTI-KUNDALINI!*.
NOT EVEN YOUR ASHES WILL REMAIN.
"...BHARAT...
'HIGH RISK TRAINING SESSION' MY FOOT--I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET MY BROTHERS TALK ME INTO THIS!
SHOULDN'T LOOK DOWN... WON'T LOOK DOWN... D-DON'T LOOK DOWN!
"...SHATRUGHAN...
UP AND READY BROTHERS...
"...LAKSHMAN..."
*THE REACTOR WHICH PROCESSES THE ENERGY THAT CUTS THROUGH THE NOXIOUS CLOUDS AND BRINGS SUNLIGHT TO ARMAGARH.
ONCE AGAIN, FOR THE RECORD LET ME SAY THAT THIS IS A BAD IDEA--ESPECIALLY FOR YOU, LITTLE BROTHERS...

"...AND RAMA."
BUT I'M HAPPY TO TEACH YOU ANOTHER LESSON...

"IT'S *TIME* THEY SHOULD TAKE UP THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES."

NOW!

SHIRRRAVVVKKKK...

UHNNN...

KKLANNKKK!

WITH YOU, BROTHER, ONE ALWAYS HAS TO WATCH HIS BACK!

EVERY MAN FIGHTS FOR HIS OWN, RAMA...

...THAT'S THE WAY OF KSHATRIYA.

SHWFFF...

H...HEY!

SHATRU... LOOK OUT!

OI MAA*!
*MOMMA.
OVERWEIGHT BOZO... HA HA HA...
H-HEELLP! BY GOD!
HAH! QUIT WHINING AND GET UP BY YOURSELF, IDIOT, I CAN'T BELIEVE FATHER NAMED YOU 'SHATRUGHAN'--SLAYER OF ENEMIES!

AAIIIIIIII...!
MAAAA...!
HANG ON, TUBBY!
YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE GOT INTO THIS MADNESS... YOU'RE *AFRAID* OF HEIGHTS FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE!
I... I WAS AFRAID OF LOSING HONOR...
SHATRUGHAN, STUPIDITY DOES NOT EQUAL BRAVERY.
GAME OVER, *BHAI* *.
NOW EACH OF YOU OWE US FIVE HUNDRED MUDRAS*.
*BROTHER.
*ARMAGARHIAN CURRENCY.

WELL, IT'S JUST YOU AND ME, LAKSHMAN
I ALWAYS KNEW IT WOULD COME DOWN TO US. THE *BLUE BOY* CAN'T HACK IT.
AHHH...!
ATTENTION! YOU ARE TRESPASSING...
THE PENALTY CAN AMOUNT TO BANISHMENT OR IMPRISONMENT...
WAIT, THIS WAS MY IDEA. I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR THE *SECURITY BREACH* AND ACCESS TO THE *OORJA SHAFT*.
I'LL FACE THE CONSEQUENCES.
WRONG TIME TO GO BIG BROTHER ON US RAMA! IN FACT, IT WAS *MY* IDEA TO BEGIN WITH.
ARREST ME.
THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY FOR NOW. THE MAHARAJ SUMMONS ALL FOUR OF YOU...SEEMS ARMAGARH IS TO MISS YOUR *ANTICS*, FOR A WHILE ANYWAY.

THE RAJ MAHAL -- ROYAL ABODE OF CHIEF COUNCILOR DASHRATH AND HIS FAMILY.
OUR FATHER, THE MAHARAJ DESIRES AN AUDIENCE WITH US? HMMPHH... WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME HE DESIRED TO SEE OUR FACES?
LEAVE HIM BE, LAKSHMAN. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE LIES ON HIS AGED SHOULDERS.
PERHAPS WAR IS AFOOT! ONE CAN PRAY.
I JUST HOPE THAT DAMNED ARTHRITIS IS NOT BOTHERING HIM. HE'S GETTING OLD.
PRANAAM PITASHREE*, I ASKED THE GUARDS NOT TO ANNOUNCE OUR ARRIVAL. WE WANTED TO CATCH YOU BY SURPRISE.
*RESPECTFUL GREETINGS, FATHER.
PITASHREE... FATHER?!

UH... HUHHH!
PARDON YOUR OLD FATHER, BOYS. MY EYES WENT HEAVY AS I AWAITED YOUR ARRIVAL.
THE VAIDYA* HAS REPEATEDLY ADVISED YOU NOT TO SLEEP IN YOUR CHAIR. IT'S BAD FOR YOUR BACK.
NONSENSE, I CANNOT LEAD ARMAGARH LYING IN BED.
*PHYSICIAN.
SINCE WE ALL HAVE OTHER MATTERS TO ATTEND TO, MIGHT WE KEEP THIS FAMILY REUNION SHORT?
LAKSHMAN... SHOW A LITTLE RESPECT!
IT'S ALRIGHT RAMA, I UNDERSTAND YOUR BROTHER'S RESENTMENT. I'VE NEVER BEEN MUCH OF A FATHER. I COULDN'T BE. I'D LIKE TO MAKE THAT UP, BUT NOT NOW. HE'S RIGHT, THIS IS NOT MEANT TO BE A REUNION.
AS THE ASURA ASSAULTS GROW, A NEW BATCH OF KSHATRIYA WARRIORS SHALL BE DEPLOYED IN THE VARIOUS OUTPOSTS OF ARMAGARH. BEING THE SONS OF THE CHIEF COUNCILOR, YOU WILL BE GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY TO GOVERN TWO ESTABLISHMENTS AS SELECTED BY THE COUNCIL.
FINALLY... ITS TIME FOR MY VAJRA* TO TASTE ASURA BLOOD.
WHICH OUTPOSTS?
*BHARAT'S AXE.

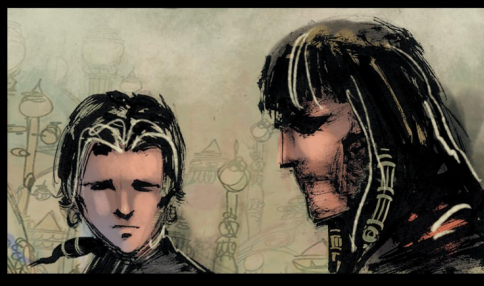
HERE LIES KHUNDGIRI, OUR FORT IN THE SOUTH OF RIVER SARAYU OVERLOOKING THE ISHPAAT* MINES AND PROTECTING THE PORT THAT CONTROLS OUR TRADE ROUTES. BHARAT, FROM NOW ON YOU ARE THIS COLONY'S GOVERNOR AND WILL REPEL THE ASURA FORCES IF THEY TRY TO INVADE US. SHATRUGHAN WILL JOIN YOU AS YOUR AIDE.
*STEEL.
GREAT. SHATRU CAN OVERSEE THE MINES AND PORTS. I WILL GLADLY RID THE LAND OF ASURAS.
BUT WHAT IF THE ASURAS ATTACK THE MINES OR THE DOCKS INSTEAD OF THE FORT?
TUBBY, YOU SHOULD BE SO LUCKY!
YOU CAN REFLECT UPON YOUR RESPECTIVE DUTIES DURING THE COURSE OF YOUR TRAVEL. AS FOR YOU, RAMA AND LAKSHMAN, PREPARE TO TAKE CONTROL OVER FORT JANASTHAN.
JANASTHAN? IT'S A VILLAGE FILLED WITH RUSTICS. WHAT WOULD YOU EXPECT US TO DO THERE? ORGANIZE AGRICULTURE? COLLECT TIMBER?
QUIET LAKSHMAN. IF THE COUNCIL DEEMS IT, IT'S OUR DUTY TO DO IT.
WE'RE NOT SOCIAL WORKERS. WE'RE WARRIORS AND I DEMAND COMBAT. SEND US TO RECLAIM SAYAN-CHAR, OR AT LEAST LET US TAKE CONTROL OVER FORT VAMANAKSH...!
THE COUNCIL IS DECIDED UPON THIS MY SON. I CAN DO NOTHING ABOUT IT.
OH MAHARAJ, DON'T DENY THAT YOU INFLUENCED THE COUNCIL. RAMA AND LAKSHMAN ARE TO SECURE THE SLEEPY OUTPOST OF JANASTHAN WHILE MY SONS ARE THROWN INTO THE PERILS OF KHUNDGIRI!
M...MOTHER!

KAIKEYI, I HAVE ALWAYS TREATED MY BOYS *EQUALLY*. IT WAS YOUR FRIENDS IN THE COUNCIL WHO ELECTED THE SITES WHERE THEY WOULD BE POSTED.
HOW *SHAMELESSLY* YOU HIDE THE TRUTH, MAHARAJ. WHY WON'T YOU ADMIT THAT YOU STILL CANNOT PART WITH THE MEMORIES OF YOUR DEAR DECEASED *KAUSHALYA*?
IT'S OKAY MAA, I CAN USE THE EXERCISE. IT'S FOR TUBBY THAT I AM CONCERNED.
DON'T CALL ME TUBBY!
PRANAAM MATASHREE*, THOUGH WE WERE NOT BORN OF YOU, LAKSHMAN AND I HAVE ALWAYS HOPED YOU WOULD ACCEPT US LIKE A MOTHER...
...BUT BHARAT AND SHATRUGHAN ARE OUR BROTHERS. WE WOULD GLADLY EXCHANGE PLACES WITH THEM IF THE COUNCIL DEEMED IT.
HMMM... ALREADY QUITE DEFT YOU ARE IN THE ART OF DIPLOMACY.
*RESPECTFUL GREETINGS, MOTHER.
RAMA... DON'T BEND DOWN TO THIS WOMAN. WE'VE STRUGGLED OUR WHOLE LIVES FOR HER ACCEPTANCE. NO MORE.
MAY THE GODS HELP ME.
DON'T TRY MY PATIENCE BOY!
LIKE I GIVE A DAMN... YOU BASE WOMAN! MY PATIENCE EBBS TOO!
HEY... THAT'S OUR MOTHER YOU'RE TALKING TO.
AFTER YOUR MOTHER *KAUSHALYA* PASSED AWAY, THE WORLD HAS GOTTEN BLEAKER FOR ME EVERY DAY. I LOVE YOU MORE THAN ANYTHING RAMA... PLEASE FORGIVE ME.
YOU ALWAYS DESERVED MUCH MORE, MUCH BETTER.
FATHER, PLEASE REST FOR A WHILE.
GET AWAY FROM THIS MIRE OR IT MAY *THREATEN* TO CONSUME YOU LIKE IT DID ME. THE THREAT OF RAVAN IS MORE PROFOUND THAN ANY OF US CAN EVEN CONTEMPLATE, I AM AFRAID. HIS MALICE SPREADS IN OUR OWN LAND.
ENOUGH! I WON'T TOLERATE ANYMORE OF THIS IN MY QUARTERS. THE DECISION HAS BEEN MADE AND MY SONS WILL FULFILL THEIR RESPECTIVE DUTIES.
ALL OF YOU ARE *DISMISSED*! GIVE ME SOME *SILENCE*!

VIMANTAL--THE AIRFIELD OF ARMAGARH
UMM... BHARAT, YOU SAID THAT I COULD HAVE THE DOUBLE BLADED LANCE.
YOU HAVE SOME NERVE ASKING ME FOR ANYTHING AFTER THE WAY YOU TREATED MY MOTHER.

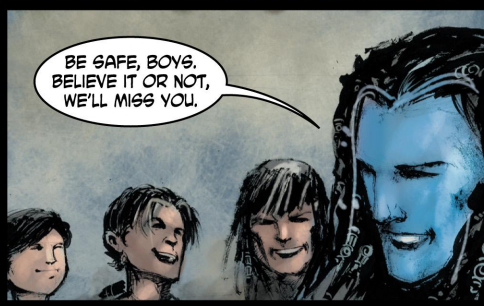
HEY, I DIDN'T START IT!
EASY... EASY... I'M KIDDING YOU. NO ONE KNOWS BETTER THAN ME HOW DIFFICULT SHE CAN BE. I SHOULD BE MAKING THE PEACE OFFERING.

UHH...



COME ON LAKSHMAN...YOU IDIOT... GIVE HIM A HUG.

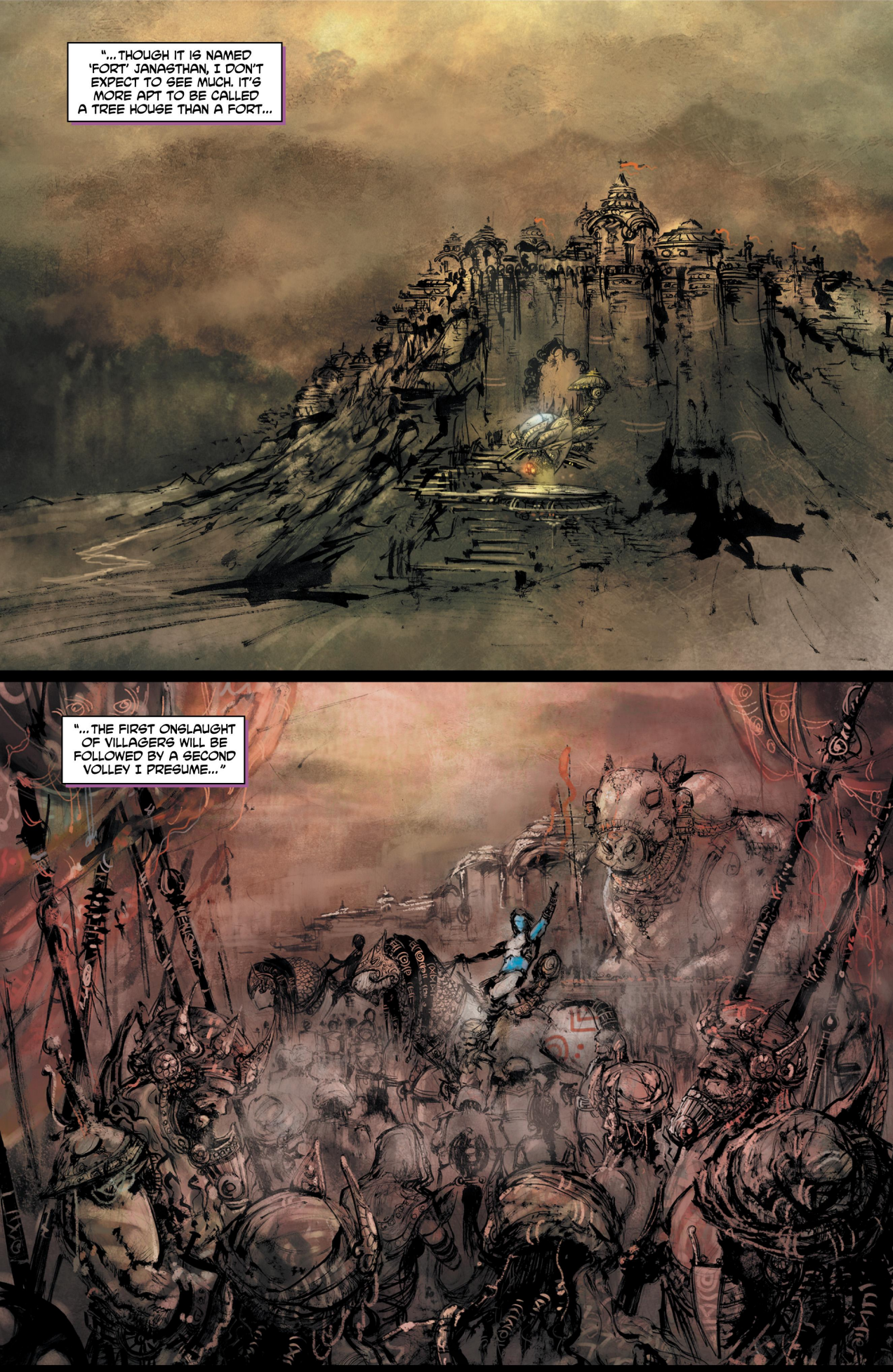
TAKE CARE, BROTHER.


BE SAFE, BOYS. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, WE'LL MISS YOU.

BY THE WAY, HAVE YOU EXAMINED THE CHARTS AND THE REPORTS PREPARED BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNOR OF JANASTHAN?
NO.
THEY HAVEN'T PAID TAXES FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS. ARMAGARH DOESN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE THEM AS THE CITIZENS OF OUR NATION. HAVE YOU SEEN THE PRODUCTION REPORTS OF THIS WRETCHED PLACE?
MAYBE.
RAMA, FOR TWO DECADES THEY'VE NOT UPGRADED THE FORT'S TECHNOLOGY. PLEBEIANS! WHY CAN'T THEY UNDERSTAND, LACK OF NECESSITY DOES NOT MEAN LACK OF INITIATIVE FOR PROGRESS?
GOOD TO MEET YOU PILOT JAYANT!
IT SHOULD BE A SMOOTH JOURNEY, LORDS.
I WOULD HOPE SO. YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU AS THE BEST IN THE FLEET. I INVESTED A FEW MUDRAS TO SECURE YOU AND A LITTLE MORE TO ENSURE BHARAT AND SHATRUGHAN EXPERIENCE A LITTLE 'TURBULENCE' ON THEIR RIDE.
CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS? THEIR PRIME FUEL IS WOOD?!
RAMA, ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME?
OCCASIONALLY...
YOU KNOW, RAMA...

...YOUR TALENT FOR ANNOYING PEOPLE IS AS UNIQUE AS YOUR COMPLEXION. DON'T PATRONIZE ME.
HA HA HA... DON'T WORRY LITTLE BROTHER, TWO YEARS OF CLOSE PROXIMITY IN JANASTHAN WILL MAKE YOU GET USED TO IT.
THE CHARIOT IS READY TO TAKE OFF LORDS.
THEN LET'S FLY JAYANT, CANT WAIT TO GET TO JANASTHAN. GOOD LUCK AND GODSPEED TO US.
MAY THE GODS BLESS MY SONS SUMANTRA... ESPECIALLY RAMA. HE IS SO DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS.
YOU MUST BE PROUD TO SIRE SUCH A GEM OF A BOY, MAHARAJ. I ENVY YOU FOR THAT.
I CAN'T BELIEVE FATHER APPOINTED YOU AS A GOVERNOR OF A WHOLE SETTLEMENT.
YOU WON'T NEED THESE ANYMORE. THEY'LL RUIN YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION.
WELL, SOMETIMES I DON'T BELIEVE FATHER SIRED YOU AT ALL--YOU NEVER SMILE.
SO TELL ME LAKSH... WHAT ARE YOU EXPECTING IN JANASTHAN? IT SEEMS YOU ALREADY KNOW A LOT MORE ABOUT THE PLACE THAN I DO.
WELL MY IMMEDIATE CONCERN... RATHER, APPREHENSION, IS THAT SOON AS WE LAND WE WILL BE HOUNDED BY HORDES OF...
HEH HEH HEH...

"...HALF-NAKED CHILDREN.
"IF EVEN ONE OF THEM TOUCHES ME WITH THEIR FILTHY HANDS, I'LL LOSE IT FOR SURE."
SHOO...SHOO... GET AWAY FROM ME! NO TOUCH!


"... THOUGH IT IS NAMED 'FORT' JANASTHAN, I DON'T EXPECT TO SEE MUCH. IT'S MORE APT TO BE CALLED A TREE HOUSE THAN A FORT...
"... THE FIRST ONSLAUGHT OF VILLAGERS WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A SECOND VOLLEY I PRESUME..."

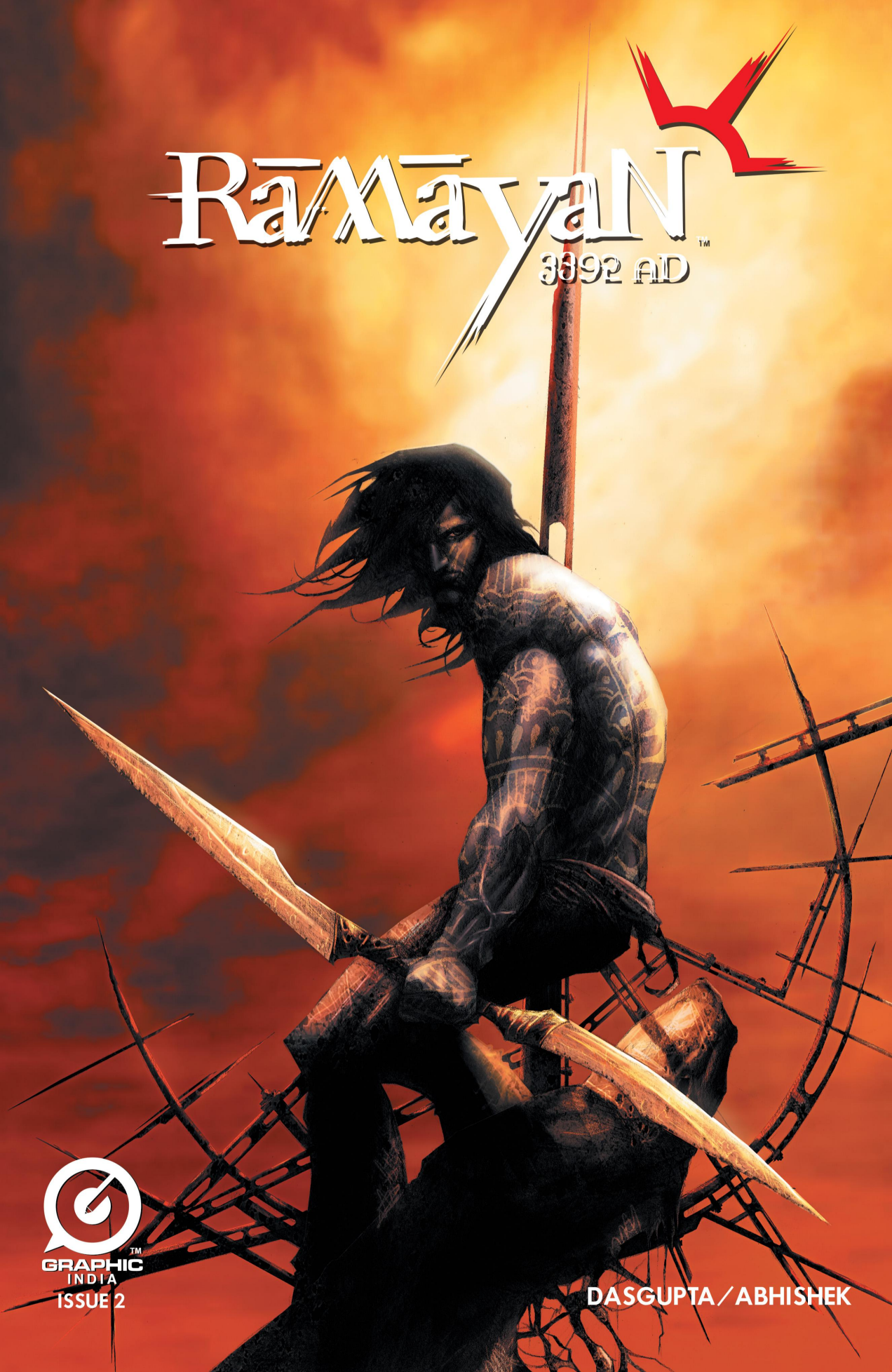
"...SOME SELF-IMPORTANT CHIEFTAIN AND HIS ENTIRE CLAN FORCING THEIR CRUDE WELCOMING RITUALS ON TWO UNSUSPECTING ARMAGARHIANS...
"...I AM IN MORTAL FEAR THAT AT NIGHT WE WILL BE COMPELLED TO PARTICIPATE IN THEIR HEATHEN FESTIVITIES...
LACHHMAN-JI*... HAVE SOME BHAANG FOR A CHANGE, IT'S MADE OF COW MEAD.
*RESPECTFUL TITLE.
"...WHICH SHOULD INCLUDE DRINKING AS WELL. YOU'LL NOTICE WE HAVE NOT STOCKPILED ANY SURA* AND THE RUSTICS WILL DEFINITELY FORCE US TO CONSUME THEIR COUNTRY LIQUOR...
JUST A SIP LACHHMAN-JI, IT MIGHT CHANGE YOUR MOOD.
UGH... THE NAME IS *LAKSHMAN*, NOT *LACHHMAN*. THANKS, BUT NO THANKS FOR YOUR OFFER. I DON'T DRINK BHAANG*.
*ARMAGARHIAN VINTAGE LIQUOR.
"HEAVEN KNOWS WHAT VILE CONCOCTION THEY MAKE IN THE NAME OF LIQUOR, WHAT PUTRID INGREDIENTS THEY MAY USE.
MMMM... NOT BAD ACTUALLY!
NOT BAD AT ALL...!
"...I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO STAY DRY FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS..."

EARLY NEXT MORNING.
CHEAP COUNTRY LIQUOR.
BOY--GO GET ME SOME MEDICINES. YOUR LOT MUST HAVE SOME POTION THAT WOULD REMEDY SUCH A HEADACHE.
UM...LORD, THE WOODSMEN WHO WENT TO GATHER TIMBER LAST EVENING HAVE NOT RETURNED YET.
BAH! WHO CARES? THE LOUTS PROBABLY GOT DRUNK AND LIE SENSELESS SOMEWHERE IN THE WOODS WHILE THEIR WIVES AND CHILDREN WORRY THEMSELVES TO DEATH.
AND DON'T FOOL YOURSELF. YOUR KIND ARE NOT KNOWN FOR YOUR INSTINCTS. KNOW YOUR PLACE: GET ME MY MEDICINE.
I'M SORRY, LORD. I'LL GET SOMETHING FOR YOUR HEADACHE RIGHT AWAY.
I WOULD BEG TO DIFFER MY LORD... W...WHAT'S THAT?!
MY LORD- LOOK, IN THE DISTANCE--
BAAP RE*!
*BY MY FATHER!
RING THE ALARM...LOCK THE GATES...CALL RAMA!
WE ARE UNDER ATTACK!

HOW MANY ARE THERE?
AT LEAST THREE THOUSAND STRONG, MY LORD. THEY SEEM TO HAVE APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE!
LOOKS LIKE THEY HAVE ALSO BROUGHT THE WOODSMEN WITH THEM.
BEEN WAITING FOR THIS. ARE YOU READY RAMA?
"DO WE HAVE ANY CHOICE?"

JANASTHANIS... MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS...
FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS YOU HAVE FLOURISHED IN THIS LAND. YOU HAVE MADE THIS PLACE SOMETHING MORE THAN JUST A REMOTE SETTLEMENT OF ARMAGARH. YOU HAVE MADE IT HOME AND FILLED IT WITH LIFE AND LOVE.
THE ASURAS ARE HERE TO STRANGLE YOUR LOVE AND SNATCH AWAY YOUR LIFE. THEY WON'T BE CONTENT BY TAKING AWAY YOUR LAND, YOUR BELONGINGS, YOUR TREASURES... THE ONLY THING THAT CAN SATE THEIR LUST FOR VIOLENCE, IS OUR LIVES.
TODAY WE DEFEND OUR FORT, OUR HOMES, AND OUR FAMILIES.
TODAY, WE FIGHT...
...FOR OUR RIGHT TO SURVIVE!
...Jai Rama!
...Jai Rama!
...Jai Rama!
...Jai Rama!
...Jai Rama!

AAKRAMANNN*!
*ATTACK.
TO BE CONTINUED.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In the distant future, a great epic unfolds. Armagarh, the last bastion of human kind, is plagued by relentless asura demon attacks on its various outposts. In response, Armagarh's chief councilor deploys new batches of kshatriya warriors to the various outposts, including his four sons Rama, Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughan. Rama, the eldest brother, along with the younger Lakshman is sent to the uneventful and docile outpost of Janasthan. Frustrated by the rural atmosphere of Janasthan and desirous of combat, the fiery Lakshman makes his unhappiness known. But then, amidst these tranquil days, Janasthan is attacked by a great horde of asuras who appear seemingly out of nowhere upon the horizon. Rising to the occasion and for the first time embracing his rank and duty, Rama prepares his brother as well as the ill-equipped, untrained, and under-manned Janasthanis for a battle to survive.

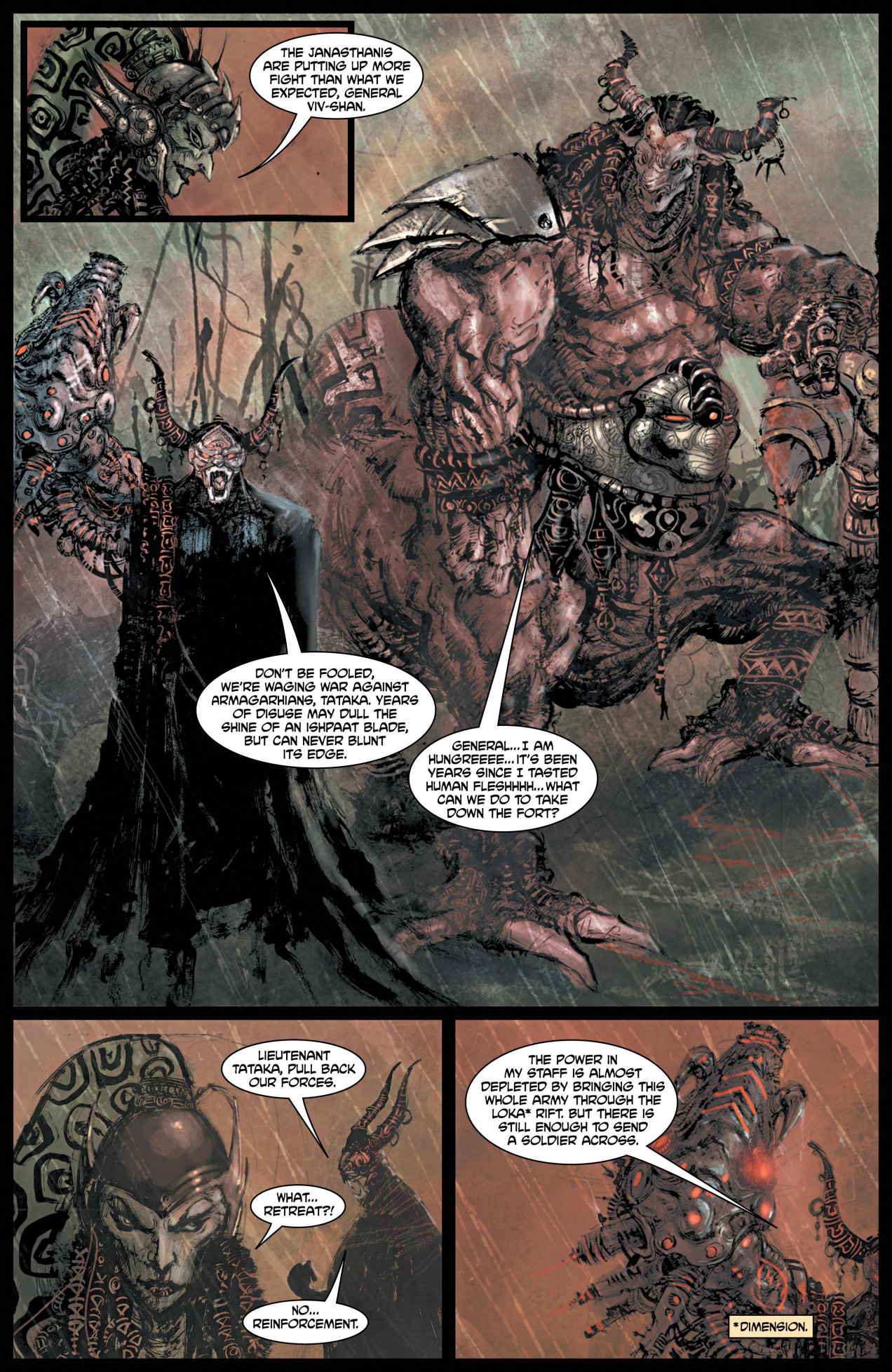
"LAKSHMAN, BROTHER. DON YOUR ARMOUR. IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG EVENING."

"IN FACT, IT MAY BE OUR LAST, RAMA."

"RIGHT YOU ARE. TONIGHT THEY'VE COME WITH A SINGULAR INTENTION. AND IT IS NOT KIND TOWARD US."

THHDOOOM!
THHDOOOM!
PRADHAAN-JI*, HOW MUCH LONGER WILL THE GATES HOLD?
*CHIEFTAIN
THIS IS AN ARMAGARHIAN FORT MY LORD. THE GATES ARE LINED WITH ISHPAAT FROM THE MINES OF KHUNDGIRI. IT ONCE WOULD HAVE HELD BACK AN ENTIRE AKSHAUHINI* IF REQUIRED.
BUT I FEAR YEARS OF POOR MAINTENANCE HAVE ERODED MUCH OF ITS FORMER INVULNERABILITY.
*HUGE ARMY
BUT I'M EVEN MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE WALLS . THE MASONRY IS OVERGROWN WITH VEGETATION. THE ROOTS OF THE CREEPERS HAVE WEAKENED THE MORTAR. A CONCENTRATED ATTACK ON ANY WEAK PART OF THE WALL MAY DEVASTATE THE WHOLE FORT.
THEN ALERT THE GARRISON TO KEEP A KEEN EYE ON THE DILAPIDATED SECTIONS OF THE WALLS. ANY ONSLAUGHT MUST BE BROKEN OFF IMMEDIATELY.
HEAVEN KNOWS HOW THE ASURAS REACHED SO FAR UNDETECTED BY OUR SCANNERS!
SHOOT THE DAITYAS*, YOU MORONS. THEY ARE DRIVING THE RAM. THE RAKSHASAS** CAN BE TAKEN CARE OF LATER!
*GIANTS
**DEMONS

LORD, THEY HAVE TWO LADDERS UP THIS SIDE... I... I...
HOLD THEM AT BAY, BOY! I'M ON THE DAITYAS.
T-THERE ARE TOO MANY. I CAN'T DO IT ALONE!
FOR GOD'S SAKE, JUST PRETEND TO BE A SOLDIER... IF EVEN FOR A MOMENT!
YES, MY LORD...
HHHRRRNNNN...
FOR ARMAGARH...


THE JANASTHANIS ARE PUTTING UP MORE FIGHT THAN WHAT WE EXPECTED, GENERAL VIV-SHAN.
DON'T BE FOOLED, WE'RE WAGING WAR AGAINST ARMAGARHIANS, TATAKA. YEARS OF DISUSE MAY DULL THE SHINE OF AN ISHPAAT BLADE, BUT CAN NEVER BLUNT ITS EDGE.
GENERAL... I AM HUNGREEEE... IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE I TASTED HUMAN FLESHHHH... WHAT CAN WE DO TO TAKE DOWN THE FORT?
LIEUTENANT TATAKA, PULL BACK OUR FORCES.
WHAT... RETREAT?!
NO... REINFORCEMENT.
THE POWER IN MY STAFF IS ALMOST DEPLETED BY BRINGING THIS WHOLE ARMY THROUGH THE LOKA* RIFT. BUT THERE IS STILL ENOUGH TO SEND A SOLDIER ACROSS.
*DIMENSION.

HOW IS THE GARRISON HOLDING, LAKSH?
INCOMPETENT FOOLS, THEY HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO DEFEND A FORT. STILL, I CAN SEE SOMETHING STRANGE BELOW; THE ASURAS ARE BACKING OFF.
MAYBE THEY HAVE GIVEN UP.
DON'T COUNT ON IT.
THIS ISN'T A RETREAT. THEY ARE UP TO SOMETHING.
I HAVEN'T SEEN ANY VAYU YAANS* WITH THEM. HOW DID SUCH A VAST ARMY REACH THIS PLACE TOTALLY UNDETECTED? HAVE YOU ESTABLISHED ANY CONTACT WITH ARMAGARH YET?
YOU WERE RIGHT; THE EQUIPMENT IS ANCIENT AND UNUSABLE. AND THE SCOUTS DIDN'T MAKE IT. WE'RE ON OUR OWN.
*AIR CRAFTS.
SO IT IS!
NO NEED TO WORRY, LITTLE BROTHER. AS LONG AS WE CAN DEFEND THIS FORT, NO HARM WILL COME TO US.
NO FEAR IN ME. BUT IT'S NOT LONG TILL THEY BREACH THE WALLS.
CONSTANT VIGILANCE, MY BROTHERS... PROTECT THE WALL AND WE'RE SAFE INSIDE. THE ASURAS WILL TRY PENETRATING THE PERIMETER OF JANASTHAN. THE WAR IS NOT OVER YET!

IT'S BEEN AN HOUR AND NO MOVEMENT ON THEIR SIDE YET. MAYBE THAT'S IT FOR NOW.
HMMPH... FAT CHANCE. HAVE YOU EVER FOUGHT ASURAS BEFORE, KESHAV?
UM... NO, I WAS BORN AND BROUGHT UP IN JANASTHAN. WE NEVER HAD TO FACE THESE BASTARDS.
I CAME TO JANASTHAN A FEW YEARS BACK WITH THE PREVIOUS GOVERNOR. I'VE SEEN THESE DEMONS IN ACTION WHILE I WAS POSTED IN KHUNDGIRI. THEIR POWERS ARE SUPERNATURAL.
PRECISELY!
AAAARGH!
KKHCHH!
GAAAAHH!
ASURAS... BUT HOW? FROM WHERE?!

WE'VE BEEN BREACHED... SECURE THE WALLS!
SLURCKK!
HAIL RAVANNNN...
CLICK!
GOD IS GREAT. RAVAN IS GREATER.
WHOOOOMM...
BADDOOOMMM!!

GRAB ON TO MY HAND!
URRRRGHH... THE WALL... HOW MUCH DAMAGE THEY HAVE DONE!
"THE WALL WITHSTOOD. WE'LL BE SAFE FOR A WHILE."
"THINK AGAIN. HAVE A CLOSER LOOK, RAMA--SUICIDE BOMBERS."
BADDOOOMMM!!
BADDOOOMMM!!
DAMN THOSE IDIOTS. THEY CALL THEMSELVES MARTYRS, BUT THEY'RE JUST HOPELESS PAWNS FOOLED BY A MADMAN.
KKRRKKRRRTTT!!
WHRROOOOMMRRR!!

ALL MEN AT ARMS! BARRICADE THE RIFT IN THE WALL! THE ASURAS MUST BE STOPPED AT ALL COST. OTHERWISE WE *ALL* DIE!
LET THEM COME. THE STONES AND MORTAR MIGHT HAVE FALLEN, BUT THEY'LL FIND A WALL OF SHARP STEEL AND RESOLVE BLOCKING THEIR WAY.
WE'LL FIGHT TO DEATH!
NO CHIEF, FIGHT TO LIVE.
HA HAH HA HAAAA... AT LAST... AT LAST...

HRRAAARRKK...
PEACE IN DEATH, SOLDIER. SLEEP WELL.

THAT'S FOR MY SON!
IF YOU LOVE HIM SO MUCH...
JOIN HIM.
NOOOOO...

AAARGHHH!
SO THIS IS HOW IT ENDS? DEATH UNTO ME.
HEH HEH... FLIMSY BOY, CARVE YOU UP... GOOD MEATTT...
BACK OFF!

GHH... VILE RAKSHASA!

HOLD ON. I'LL GET YOU TO THE VAIDYA*.

*DOCTOR

WHAT'S THE USE? HE'LL ONLY PROLONG THE SUFFERING. LET ME DIE IN THE BLOOD SOAKED SOIL OF JANASTHAN AND ATTAIN VEERGATI*.

ARE YOU INSANE, LAKSHMAN? YOU HAVE LONG YEARS TO LIVE.

*PARADISE

ALL WE HAVE LEFT IS THE GLORY OF OUR FIGHT...

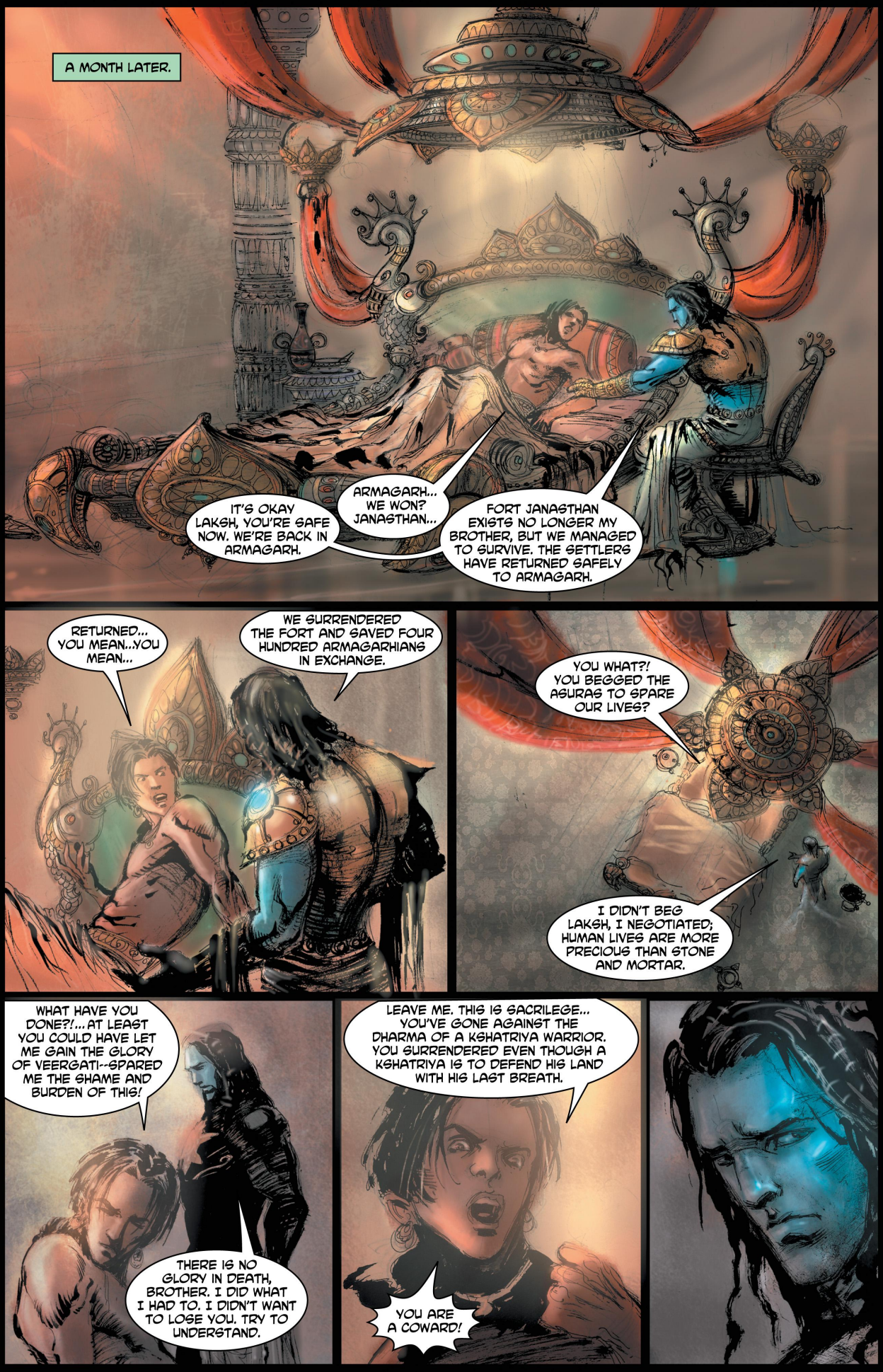
"LORD, THEIR FORCES ARE RELENTLESS AND EVERYWHERE."

"IT'S A BLOOD-LETTING LIKE WE'VE NEVER SEEN.
"THE PLAINS ECHO WITH THE SILENCE OF DEATH."

AND NOW? STATUS?
NOT GOOD, OUR NUMBERS ARE SEVERELY DEPLETED. THEY'VE DRAWN BACK FOR A WHILE, BUT I DOUBT WE CAN TAKE ANOTHER ATTACK.
HOW IS LAKSHMAN FARING?
MY LORD, THE ASURA VENOM SPREADS IN HIS BLOOD. WE NEED BETTER EQUIPMENT, AND THE VAIDYA HAS NO ANTIDOTE...
SUMMON THE FLAG BEARER.
THEY HAVE RAISED THE FLAG, GENERAL SHAN. THE GOVERNOR REQUESTS AN AUDIENCE.
SO HE DESIRES TO PARLAY...
GOOD... VERY GOOD.
HSSSSS...THE BLUE MAN...HRRR... LET HIM COME. I DESIRE TO DRINK THE JUICES OF HIS HEART.
YOU SHALL DO NO SUCH THING LIEUTENANT MAARICH, IF YOU WISH TO KEEP THE OTHER LIMBS ATTACHED TO YOUR FILTHY BODY.
I'VE BEEN OBSERVING YOU FROM A DISTANCE.
AND WHAT DID YOU OBSERVE?
A SOLDIER WITH LIMITED RESOURCES BUT UNLIMITED WILL. A GENERAL LACKING AN ARMY BUT COMMANDING A PEOPLE.

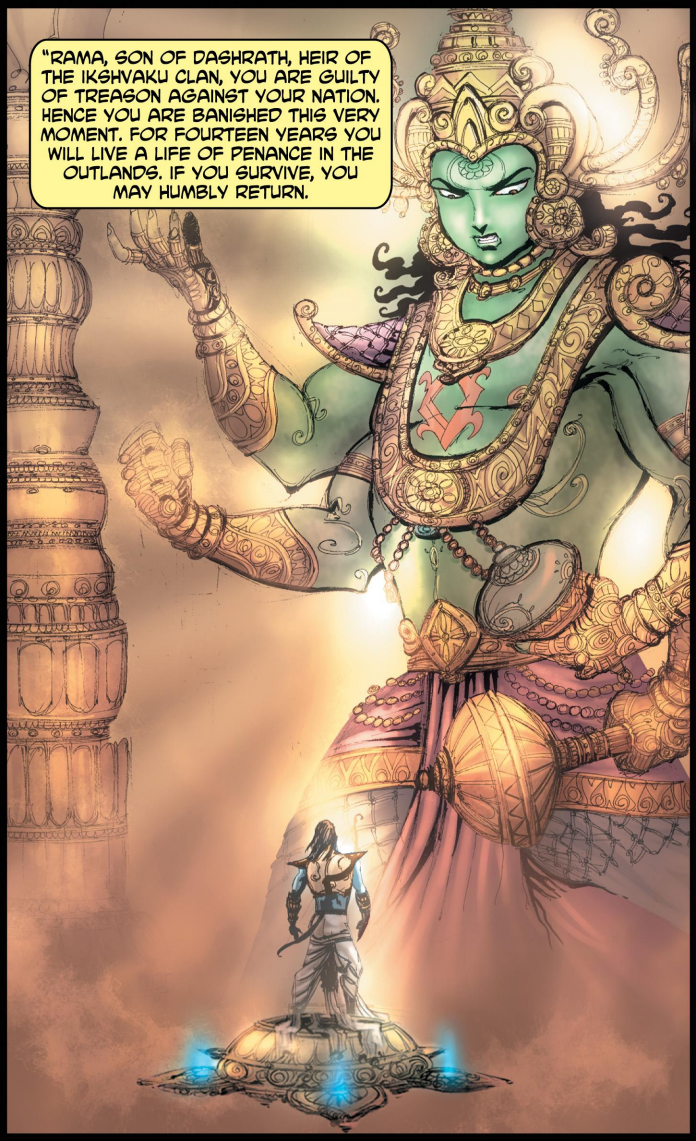
WE'LL SURRENDER THE FORT IF YOU GIVE THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN SAFE PASSAGE. THE COMBATANTS WILL LAY DOWN THEIR WEAPONS. YOU CAN TAKE US PRISONERS AND DO WHATEVER YOU WISH, BUT NO HARM SHOULD COME TO OUR KIN...
AND IF I REFUSE? IF INSTEAD I DESIRE TO KILL YOU ALL?
THEN WE FIGHT TO THE LAST MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD. WE MAY EVENTUALLY LOSE BUT YOUR FORCES WILL SPILL MORE BLOOD THAN THEY HAVE EVER KNOWN. THIS I SWEAR THIS TO YOU.
YOU ARE A REMARKABLE MAN, YOUNG GOVERNOR. I'M IMPRESSED WITH YOUR VIGOR.
VERY WELL, YOU CAN LEAVE. WE WILL NOT TAKE ANY PRISONERS, NOR WILL WE SPILL MORE BLOOD. LEAVE THIS TERRITORY AND NEVER COME BACK. JANASTHAN IS OURS.

WHAT! AND LET THE HUMAN SCUM LEAVE JUST LIKE THAT? I PROTEST. THIS IS DIRECTLY AGAINST THE ORDER OF THE HIGH COMMAND. EVERY SINGLE HUMAN SHALL BE SLAUGHTERED AND EATEN.
THIS IS A DIRECT AFFRONT TO LORD RAVAN'S SOVEREIGN WILL. YOU ARE MAKING A SEVERE MISTAKE!
SILENCE TATAKA! YOU WOULD RATHER I FACE LORD RAVAN'S CONSEQUENCES THAN YOU FACE MINE. I ASSURE YOU OF THAT!
THE DECISION'S BEEN MADE.
AS A TOKEN OF MY GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION I OFFER YOU MY SWORD.
YOU ARE A REMARKABLE ASURA INDEED, GENERAL. I AM RAMA. MAY I KNOW THE NAME OF SUCH AN UNLIKELY NARKIAN?
I AM VIV-SHAN, AND IF FATE DECREES, WE SHALL MEET AGAIN... SOMEDAY.
IN ONE HOUR-BURN THE FORT!


A MONTH LATER.
IT'S OKAY LAKSH, YOU'RE SAFE NOW. WE'RE BACK IN ARMAGARH.
ARMAGARH... WE WON? JANASTHAN...
FORT JANASTHAN EXISTS NO LONGER MY BROTHER, BUT WE MANAGED TO SURVIVE. THE SETTLERS HAVE RETURNED SAFELY TO ARMAGARH.
RETURNED... YOU MEAN...YOU MEAN...
WE SURRENDERED THE FORT AND SAVED FOUR HUNDRED ARMAGARHIANS IN EXCHANGE.
YOU WHAT?! YOU BEGGED THE ASURAS TO SPARE OUR LIVES?
I DIDN'T BEG LAKSH, I NEGOTIATED; HUMAN LIVES ARE MORE PRECIOUS THAN STONE AND MORTAR.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!...AT LEAST YOU COULD HAVE LET ME GAIN THE GLORY OF VEERGATI--SPARED ME THE SHAME AND BURDEN OF THIS!
THERE IS NO GLORY IN DEATH, BROTHER. I DID WHAT I HAD TO. I DIDN'T WANT TO LOSE YOU. TRY TO UNDERSTAND.
LEAVE ME. THIS IS SACRILEGE... YOU'VE GONE AGAINST THE DHARMA OF A KSHATRIYA WARRIOR. YOU SURRENDERED EVEN THOUGH A KSHATRIYA IS TO DEFEND HIS LAND WITH HIS LAST BREATH.
YOU ARE A COWARD!

THE COUNCIL HALL
LET'S NOT OVERLOOK THAT BY DESERTING JANASTHAN, RAMA SAVED THE POPULACE--OUR OWN BROTHERS AND SISTERS. MOREOVER FOR THE LAST TEN DECADES WE HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY CUT OFF FROM JANASTHAN. IT NEVER HAD ANY VALUE AS AN OUTPOST. TELL ME, FELLOW COUNCILMEN, WHAT IS, OR WAS THE WORTH OF JANASTHAN SAVE ITS PEOPLE?
EVERYTHING.
WITH EACH OUTPOST FALLEN, WE LOSE HONOR. WE LOSE CONFIDENCE. WE LOSE TERRITORY. AND DESERTING AN OUTPOST WHILE THERE WERE STILL ABLE-BODIED MEN TO DEFEND IT IS THE GREATEST SHAME OF ALL.
IS THAT NOT AGAINST EVERYTHING A KSHATRIYA STANDS FOR?
RAMA'S ACT IN JANASTHAN IS TANTAMOUNT TO TREASON.
WELL SAID COUNCILOR KAALNEMI. AS WE CAN INFER, THE MAJORITY OF THE COUNCIL ACCEDE TO THE FACT THAT RAMA'S ACT GOES AGAINST THE LAWS AND VERY BELIEF OF KSHATRIAN DHARMA. IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR CODE THEN, HE SHOULD BE COURT MARSHALED.
MAHARAJ DASHRATH, YOUR THOUGHTS?
RAMA IS MY ELDEST SON. ANY COMMENT I MAKE WILL BE TAINTED BY MY AFFECTION AND SUPREME ADMIRATION FOR HIM. I APPEAL THE COUNCIL TO GRANT ME THE PERMISSION TO ABSCOND MYSELF FROM THE DECISION-MAKING. BUT AS A REQUEST I'D LIKE TO PRAY TO THE GODS FOR THEIR FINAL JUDGMENT. LET RAMA VOICE OUT HIS PLEA IN FRONT OF THEIR MIGHTY OMNIPOTENCE.
SO BE IT.

THE 'MANDIR' ATRIUM OF GODS, THE GREAT TEMPLE OF AYODHYA.
"SOLDIER, DO YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS BEFORE YOUR FATE IS DETERMINED? ANY CONFESSION?"
I'VE NOTHING TO CONFESS. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG IN WHAT I DID.
ALL I REQUEST IS FAIR JUDGMENT.
I BELIEVE IN MY SON, AND I BELIEVE IN YOU. SPARE HIM... SPARE HIM...
GUILTY.


"RAMA, SON OF DASHRATH, HEIR OF THE IKSHVAKU CLAN, YOU ARE GUILTY OF TREASON AGAINST YOUR NATION. HENCE YOU ARE BANISHED THIS VERY MOMENT. FOR FOURTEEN YEARS YOU WILL LIVE A LIFE OF PENANCE IN THE OUTLANDS. IF YOU SURVIVE, YOU MAY HUMBLY RETURN.

"IF YOU ARE DETECTED ANYWHERE IN OR NEAR THE HALLOWED GROUND OF AMARGARH OR HER OUTPOSTS...
"...YOU SHALL BE EXECUTED IMMEDIATELY.
"LEAVE... LEAVE NOW, IN THIS INSTANT."

"FAREWELL RAMA..."
TO BE CONTINUED.

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ISSUE 3

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RAMAYAN 3392 AD

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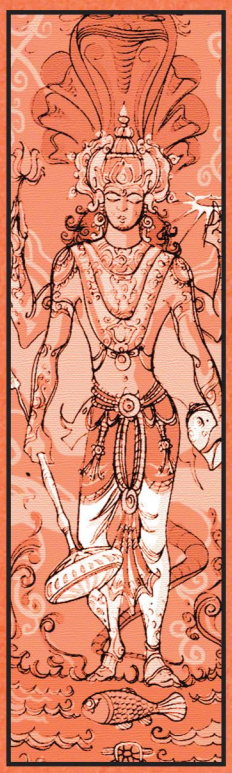


In the distant future, a nuclear holocaust overruns the planet and civilization struggles to survive. Armagarh, the last bastion of humankind is plagued by incessant asura attacks in its various outposts. Rama and Lakshman, brothers and of the warrior caste, are sent to Janasthan, a tranquil outpost far away from Armagarh.

But the serenity of Janasthan is broken when the sleepy village is attacked by the asura general Viv-Shan and his minions. The humans fight hard against the vicious asuras but are outnumbered and eventually face a potential slaughter when their forces are depleted and Lakshman befalls a grave wound. Faced with all this, Rama surrenders to Viv-Shan under the condition of sparing the women and children, and Viv-Shan agrees, defying the asura code of 'no mercy.' Alas, the citizens of Janasthan are saved but Rama's humane surrender is ajudged treason by the Armagarhian council, and confirmed by the Consortium of Holographic Gods. Rama himself is exiled from Armagarh for fourteen years.

Embittered and defeated, Rama condemns his homeland, breaks his energy bow and retreats from Armagarh's great hall. Scorned by Armagarh's authority, criticized by his brother Lakshman, and convinced that his homeland no longer defines the ideals it once was founded on, Rama embraces the idea of a life far away from all.

THE DESERT OF JARA, FIVE HUNDRED AND SIXTY YOJANS* FROM ARMAGARH.

DAMN!

*1 YOJAN = 2.3 MILES

DIDN'T CARRY ENOUGH BREAD.

FORGIVABLE...

WHIRR

CLIK

...BUT WATER...

WATER WOULD BE NICE.

WHIRR

CLIK

BUT WITH MY LUCK...

WHIRR

CLIK

...BAD...

WHIRR

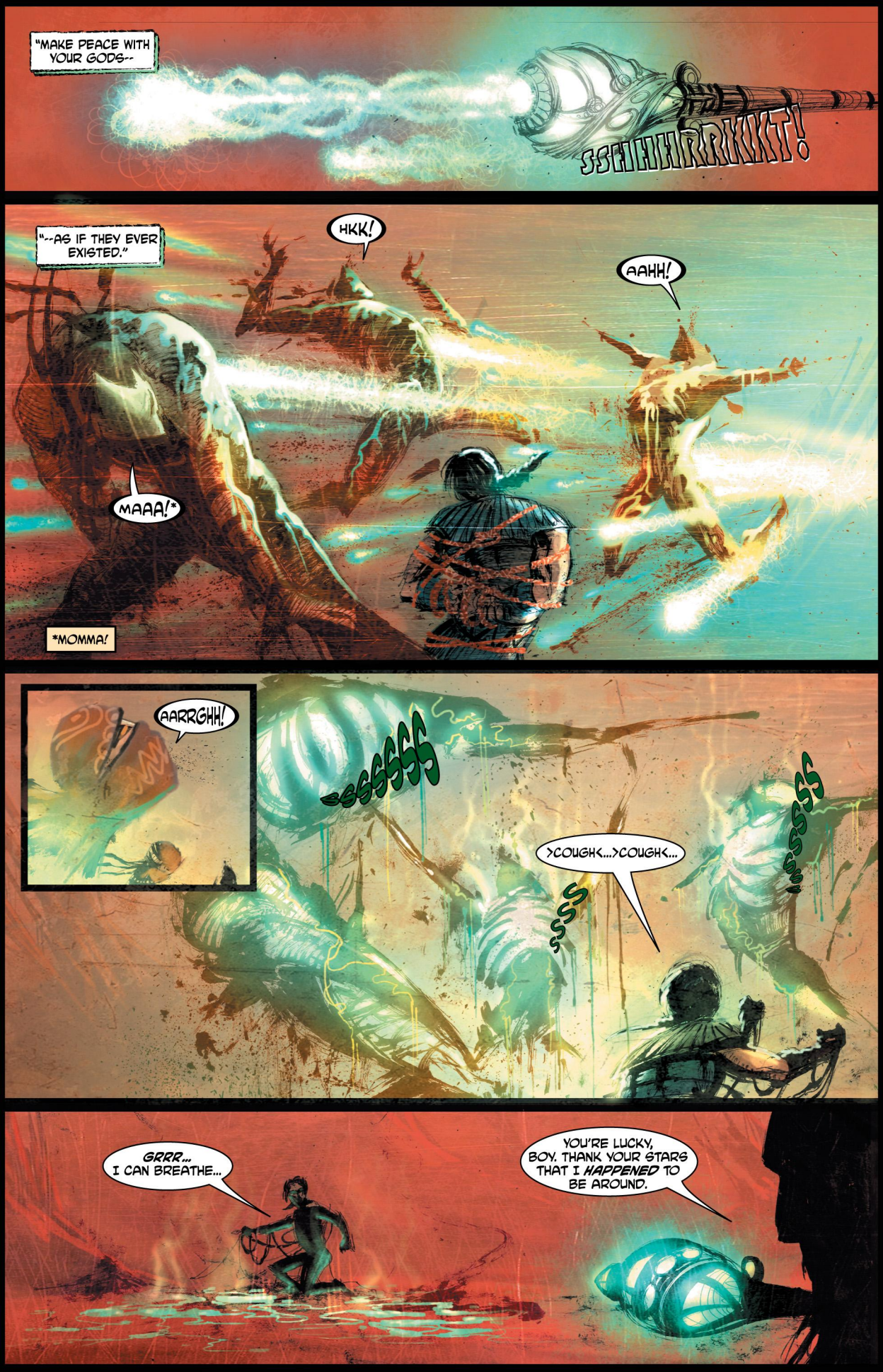
...WILL MOST DEFINITELY BECOME WORSE.

CLIK

TWINGG!
AREN'T YOU KIRATS* TIRED OF THIS?
*DESERT ASSASSINS
TWO MONTHS OF CAT AND MOUSE.
THIS TIME, LET'S END IT.
FOR YOUR SAKE.
AND FOR MINE!

WHASSAMATTER? MUM CALLING?
NOW YOU'RE HURTING MY FEELINGS.
COME OUT, COME OUT, WHEREVER YOU ARE.
YAAARGHHH!
TEJAS! BIND HIM QUICK. WE MUST TRANSPORT HIM TO THE COUNSEL IMMEDIATELY.
WHAT?...THEY DIDN'T GET MY LETTER OF RESIGNATION?
WE NO LONGER HAVE TO FEIGN ADMIRATION NOW THAT YOU HAVE FALLEN OUT OF FAVOR.

THE MASK--RIP IT OFF!
>GASP<
WHAT? AT A LOSS FOR WORDS, PRINCE CHARMING?
GO SLOW BOYS. MAKE HIM PAY!
ZZRRRRRKK
>CHOKE<
HOW ARE THOSE LUNGS FEELING? EVERY SECOND WITHOUT THE MASK MEANS A MILLION CELLS INCINERATED BY THIS DEGENERATE ATOMSPHERE. DOES IT BURN?
ZZRRRRRKK
>CHOKE<... >GASP<...
NICE AND EASY BOYS--


"MAKE PEACE WITH YOUR GODS--
SSHHHRRKKT!
"--AS IF THEY EVER EXISTED."
HKK!
AAHH!
MAAA!*
*MOMMA!
AARRGHH!
SSSSSSS
>COUGH<...>COUGH<...
SSSSSSS
SSS
GRRR... I CAN BREATHE...
YOU'RE LUCKY, BOY. THANK YOUR STARS THAT I HAPPENED TO BE AROUND.

>KAFF<... >COUGH<... LUCKY WOULD HAVE BEEN YOUR ARRIVING A FEW MINUTES EARLIER AND SAVING ME THE TROUBLE...
WHO THE *HELL* ARE YOU?
WHAT DID YOU DO, SO THAT I CAN BREATHE?
UNGRATEFUL BRAT!
INDULGE IN THE PLEASURE OF SIMPLE BREATH, BOY. AND DON'T ASK QUESTIONS. MY NAME IS *VISHWAMITRA*.
VISHWAMITRA? YOUR PARENTS NAMED YOU AFTER ONE OF THE SEVEN SEERS THAT FOUNDED ARMAGARH WAY BACK WHEN? YOUR PARENTS HAD HIGH HOPES FOR YOU, DIDN'T THEY? HE'S SAID TO BE AMONGST THE WISEST THAT *EVER* LIVED.
ANCIENT BAWDS, DON'T BELIEVE ALL THAT YOU'VE HEARD.
OLD MAN, I AM LAKSHMAN. I QUITE LIKE THE MAGIC TRICK YOU DID ON MY BREATHING. CAN YOU TURN WATER INTO WINE WITH THE NUCLEAR WITCH'S-BROOM? TELL ME, WHERE CAN I GET ONE OF THOSE?
THE *WARRIORS* OF YESTERYEAR WERE A THOUSAND TIMES MORE FORMIDABLE THAN THE *BOYS* WITH *TOYS* OF TODAY.
YEAH OKAY, LIFE WAS TOUGH WHEN YOU WERE A KID. WELL, IT'S NOT EXACTLY A BARREL FULL OF LAUGHS THESE DAYS. PRE-MAHAVINAAGH I HOPE BECAUSE I'D ARGUE THIS IS PRETTY BAD.
HEY, SPEAKING OF *WATER*, HAVE SOME?
NO.
HEY... PLEASE... I'M *DYING* OF THIRST!
I DON'T *CARRY* WATER.

>KOFF<... >KOFF<... YOU DON'T SEE THE IRONY IN SAVING ME FROM MURDERERS AND ASPHYXIATION ONLY TO WATCH ME DIE OF DEHYDRATION?
NOT A DROP.
>GROOAANNN<
HEY!
THUMP!
WHAT'S WRONG?!
UHHHHH...
OKAY, OKAY, IF IT'S WATER YOU MUST HAVE!
NEER SRIGHT!...
TRISHNA SHANTI...
UMM... GLUBB!
STEADY BOY, YOU'RE WASTING IT!

YOU'VE EARNED THE GRATITUDE OF LAKSHMAN. AND IT DOESN'T COME EASY, OLD MAN.
YOU HAVE SAVED MY DYNASTY, AS I MAY WELL BE THE LAST OF MY KIND.
AND WHAT MIGHT YOUR KIND BE, BOY? FOR YOUR BEHAVIOR MIGHT SUGGEST THE APE LADS OF KISHKINDHA THOUGH YOUR LIKENESS IS NOT FAR OFF FROM THE ULLU* OF DANDAKARANYA.
*OWL
BE STILL YOUR TONGUE OLD MAN LEST I FORGET MY GRATITUDE.
I HAIL FROM THE HOUSE OF SURYAVANSHI, THE NOBLEST OF THE IKSHVAKU CLAN... MY FATHER WAS DASHRATH, THE CELEBRATED MAHARAJA OF THE ONCE GLORIED ARMAGARH!
IKSHVAKU... ARMAGARH... HMMM... INTERESTING. MIGHT YOU KNOW OF A MAN OF UNIQUE BLUE COMPLEXION THAT HAILS FROM YOUR SAME DYNASTY?
YOU MEAN RAMA... MY ELDEST BROTHER. HE HAPPENS TO BE BLUE IN COLOR.
BUT RAMA IS NOT IN ARMAGARH. YOU'D BE WASTING YOUR TIME LOOKING FOR HIM THERE. IN FACT, YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME LOOKING FOR HIM AT ALL.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
HE WAS BANISHED ABOUT A YEAR AGO. AND KNOWING WHAT I KNOW, I'D BE SHOCKED IF HE SURVIVED THESE WASTELANDS OUT HERE.
BANISHED? A BLUE SKIN WARRIOR? IMPOSSIBLE! IT CANNOT BE!
WELL... NOT MUCH OF A WARRIOR. IT'S A LONG STORY...
LISTEN, DO YOU HAVE SOME FOOD OR SURA*? LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE GOT A BULL IN THAT SACK.
*LIQUOR
PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE JUST LET YOU BE. COULD HAVE SAVED MYSELF A LOT OF GRIEF.
HAVE IT YOUR WAY, OLD MAN. I HAVE NO INTEREST IN RAMA. I'LL BE ON MY WAY TO KHUNDGIRI WHEN DAWN BREAKS.
SO BE IT.
HEY VISH, WAIT UP!

NEXT MORNING.
AH... A NIGHT OF RESTFUL PEACE AT LAST!
WELL IT'S TRUE THAT YOU SAVED ME. SO I SUPPOSE I OWE YOU THE SAME. THE DESERT OF JARA IS NOT A SAFE PLACE FOR AN *OLD MAN* TO TRAVEL ALONE, HENCE *TWO MEN* IS ALWAYS BETTER THAN ONE.
BY THE WAY, HOW COME YOU ARE NOT WEARING AIR FILTERS, AND I CAN BREATHE WITHOUT MY MASK?
I PURIFIED THE AIR IN THE CAVE. I CAN ENDURE THE NOXIOUS GASES BUT YOUR *REEKING* CLOTHES WERE POLLUTING THE AIR BEYOND MY LIMITS.
UH... WHATEVER THAT MEANS... SEE, IF IT'S REALLY THE BLUE BOY THAT YOU WANT TO FIND, PERHAPS I CAN HELP YOU. HE IS MY *BROTHER* AFTER ALL--I KNEW HIM WELL ONCE UPON A TIME.
FINALLY--A DECENT IDEA.
WHAT THE HELL...?!
THE *ELEMENTS* WILL GUIDE OUR WAY.
THE *EARTH* WILL BE OUR *EYES*...
AND THE *WIND* WILL BE OUR *EARS*.
SO YOU CAN TURN THE EARTH INTO EYES AND THE WIND INTO EARS BUT CAN'T SNAP UP A ROTI*? I SLEPT HUNGRY LAST NIGHT!
I NEVER SAID I COULDN'T CREATE FOOD...
LET ME GUESS--SO YOU JUST CHOOSE TO EAT AIR?
*BREAD

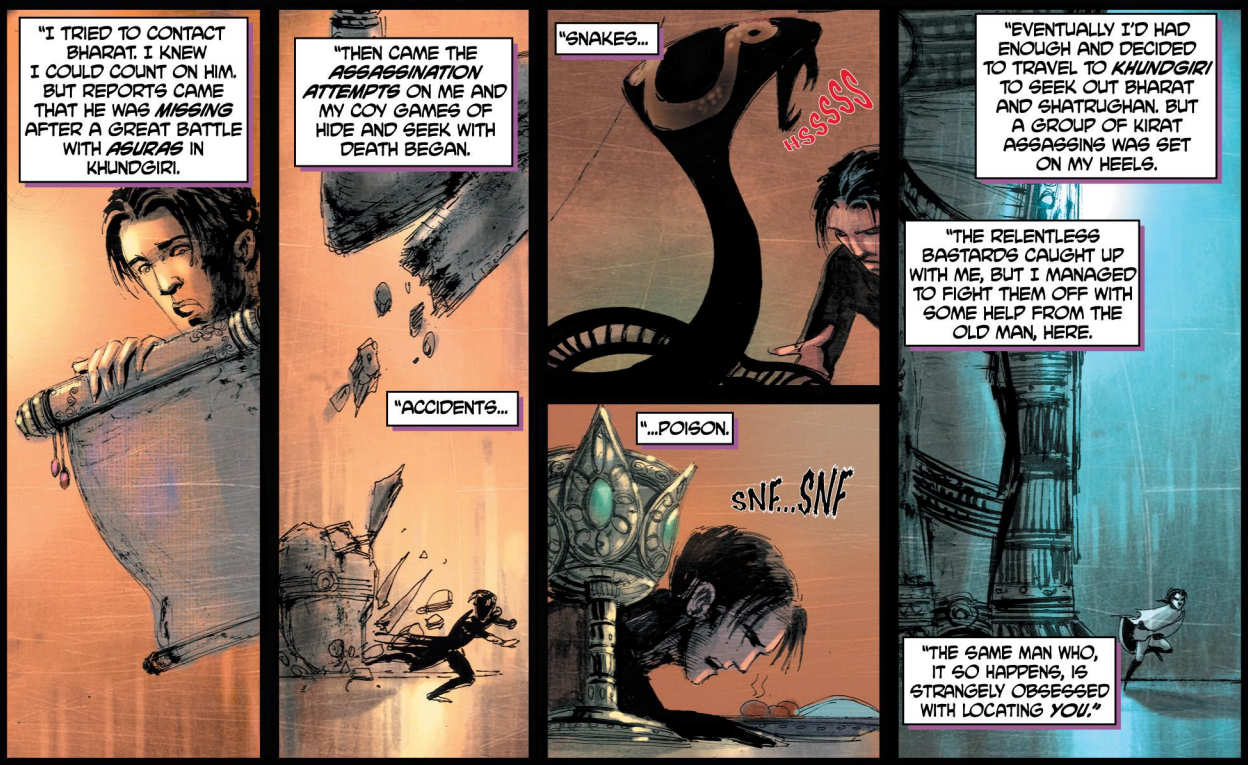
THE GREAT RIVER ANGARP... 2478 YOJANS SOUTH TO ARMAGARH.
THREE WEEKS LATER.
HAUL THE ROPE... HAUL THE ROPE... I'VE GOT A BIG ONE IN THE NET!

SOMEONE GIVE ME A HAND OVER HERE. THIS IS THE BIGGEST OF THE SEASON!
COMING!!
ALWAYS CAN COUNT ON YOU, GUHA.
AS I COUNT ON YE, BLUEBOI.
AHOY... RAFT AHEAD. TWO DRIFTERS ON IT.
HEI KASHI... THROW 'EM A ROPE AND HAUL 'EM IN.
THE RAFT IS BREAKING APART

THE... THE RAFT!
FORGET IT, GRAB THE ROPE!
SNAP
CHOPPY, IN'T IT BOYS?
>COUGHK... >COUGHK... WHATEVER YOU SAY. WE ALMOST DROWNED IN THIS CRUDDY RIVER.
LISTEN--DO YOU HAVE SOME FOOD AND DRINK? WE'LL BARTER FOR IT. CHOOSE WHATEVER YOU WANT! TAKE THE OLD MAN--ALL OF HIM. EVEN A LITTLE SURA* WILL DO.
I C'N OFFER YOU SOME WARM MILK ONCE WE GIT ASHORE. HEI BLUEBOI... FETCH SOME TOWELS FO' OUR FRIENDS.
*LIQUOR
BLUEBOY?!

LATER...
GOOD LORD, IT'S A WONDER HE'S NOT RED WITH SHAME RATHER THAN BLUE, THE WAY THESE NISHAADS* FAWN OVER HIM.
OR PERHAPS IT'S YOU WHO IS GREEN WITH ENVY.
A THOUSAND 'POLOGIES M' LORD... I COULD NOT REC'NIZE YE. I N'VR KNEW YE ARE THE SON OF THE M'RAJ.
*FISHING COMMUNITY
PLEASE STOP GUHA. YOU GAVE ME THE GREATEST RESPECT BY ACKNOWLEDGING ME AS YOUR FRIEND. I HAVE LEARNT MUCH FROM YOU.
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, BROTHER. BUT LET ME SAY ONE THING FROM THE START. MY LIFE IS GOOD HERE. I HAVE NO REASON TO ABANDON IT.
IF FATHER HAS SENT YOU TO BRING ME BACK TO ARMAGARH, THERE'S NO CHANCE OF THAT. I'M NOT EVER GOING BACK THERE.
FATHER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR MY PRESENCE HERE. IN FACT HE IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYTHING ANYMORE EXCEPT PERHAPS ATTAINING HIS OWN MOKSHA*.
HE'S DEAD.
*SPIRITUAL LIBERATION

"AFTER YOU LEFT, FATHER'S HEALTH DETERIORATED RAPIDLY. AND FINALLY HIS HEART JUST *STOPPED.*
"APPARENTLY HE COULDN'T BEAR THE ABSENCE OF HIS 'BELOVED RAMA.'
"AFTER FATHER'S DEATH, CERTAIN PEOPLE STARTED TO SHED THE MASKS THEY HAD SO SUCCESSFULLY WORN FOR MANY YEARS. WITH YOU, BHARAT, AND TUBBY GONE--PERHAPS NOT SO COINCIDENTALLY--I WAS ALONE AND OSTRACIZED BY THE ARMAGARHIAN ARISTOCRACY.
"*UNCLE SUMANTRA* RESIGNED FROM THE COUNCIL AND DISAPPEARED. THE RUMOR WAS HE'D ASSEMBLED A *FACTION*, A CABAL TO STAND AGAINST THE CORRUPTED COUNCIL.
"EVERYONE JUST ASSUMED THAT I WAS ALREADY, OR WOULD EVENTUALLY BE A PART OF IT EVEN THOUGH I HAD NO SUCH INTENTION. STILL, IT PUT ME AT EVEN MORE RISK AS I STARTED GETTING SECRET MESSAGES, AND LETTERS FROM UNCLE SUMANTRA'S REVOLUTIONARY GROUP URGING ME TO JOIN...


"I TRIED TO CONTACT BHARAT. I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON HIM. BUT REPORTS CAME THAT HE WAS *MISSING* AFTER A GREAT BATTLE WITH *ASURAS* IN KHUNDGIRI.
"THEN CAME THE *ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS* ON ME AND MY COY GAMES OF HIDE AND SEEK WITH DEATH BEGAN.
"ACCIDENTS...
"SNAKES...
HSSSSS
"...POISON.
SNF...SNF
"EVENTUALLY I'D HAD ENOUGH AND DECIDED TO TRAVEL TO *KHUNDGIRI* TO SEEK OUT BHARAT AND SHATRUGHAN. BUT A GROUP OF KIRAT ASSASSINS WAS SET ON MY HEELS.
"THE RELENTLESS BASTARDS CAUGHT UP WITH ME, BUT I MANAGED TO FIGHT THEM OFF WITH SOME HELP FROM THE OLD MAN, HERE.
"THE SAME MAN WHO, IT SO HAPPENS, IS STRANGELY OBSESSED WITH LOCATING *YOU.*"

PITASHREE... FATHER... HE IS NO MORE...!
BUT BETTER OFF NO DOUBT, FREE OF THE CUFFS FROM ORDINARY MORTALITY.
THESE ARE THE DARKEST DAYS OF ARMAGARH.
AFTER YOUR COWARDLY ACT IN JANASTHAN-- SURRENDERING TO THOSE FILTHY ASURAS, SOILING OUR CODE, OUR KIND, EVERYTHING COLLAPSED. ARMAGARH PLUNGED INTO SCANDAL AND DARKNESS. WE'VE SO MANY PROBLEMS WITHIN OUR DECAYING WALLS, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE ASURAS EXPLOIT THAT AND INVADE. THEY WON'T FIND SO MUCH AS A SOLDIER WITH HIS BOW RESISTING.
LET THEM ATTACK. ARMAGARH FELL WHEN IT ABANDONED ITS IDEALS. NOW WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?
TAKE GUHA, HE WAS AN HONEST AND LAW ABIDING CITIZEN. BUT KAALNEMI BANISHED HIM FOR SPEAKING THE TRUTH. THE CORRUPTION OF ARMAGARH DESTROYED HIM. NOW HE LIVES THOUSANDS OF YOJANS AWAY FROM HIS MOTHERLAND, SCORNED AND HUMILIATED, NOT MUCH UNLIKE ME.
ARMAGARH IS DOOMED TO FALL.
IT'S NOT JUST ARMAGARH... THE WHOLE WORLD IS DOOMED.
WE ALL ARE LOOKING DOWN THE ABYSS!
AND SO STARTS THE MAD PROPHET OF THE APOCALYPSE... YAAWWWNN...!
WHO ARE YOU, OLD MAN?

THE MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES. HE MAKES WATER FROM... NOTHING, TRACKS LOST MEN WITH WHIRLING DUST. HE'S VISH-WA-MIT-RA, NAMED AFTER ONE OF THE ORIGINAL SEVEN SEERS. HE'S QUITE A FUNNY GUY, BUT WATCH OUT! FOR HE'S GOT SOME NASTY TRICKS UP HIS GRIMY SLEEVE.
RAMA... YOU AND ME... WE HAVE TO TALK.
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN TALKING ANYMORE. I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY.
I'M HAPPY IN THE COMPANY OF THESE GOOD PEOPLE.
HAVE YOU EVER ASKED YOURSELF WHY ARE YOU BLUE IN COLOR?
WHAT MAKES YOU... SO SPECIAL?
I AM LIKE THIS FROM BIRTH. THERE'S NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT IT.
AS AN ARMAGARHIAN YOU MUST KNOW THAT THE ASURAS ARE GROWING MORE POWERFUL BY THE DAY. DO YOU KNOW WHAT MAKES THEM SO POWERFUL?
I DO. APART FROM THEIR TECHNOLOGY, THEY HAVE DEVISED A WAY TO INFILTRATE OUR LAND ESCAPING DETECTION. I SAW IT FIRSTHAND IN JANASTHAN.
KNOW THIS, YOUR ORIGIN AND THE SPECIAL POWERS OF THE ASURA FORCE ARE RELATED.
YOU KNOW OF THE LEGEND OF THE *LOKAS*?
A MAGNIFICENT MYTH.
IT'S NO MYTH.
YOU CAME *FROM ONE SUCH LOKA!*
YOU... HAVE LOST YOUR MIND.
LEAVE ME IN PEACE, OLD MAN.
I HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH FOR BELIEVING IN THE MAD DOCTRINES OF ARMAGARH, WHATEVER IT IS THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE, YOU'VE GOT THE WRONG MAN.
THEN OBSERVE...

"AN AGE OF FINAL APOCALYPSE IS UPON US.

"OUR EARTH HAS SUFFERED ENOUGH FROM THE ***MAHAVINAASH****. THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO END ALL LIFE. STILL, WE SURVIVED.

"BUT THE MAHAVINAASH WEAKENED THE ***BARRIERS*** THAT SEPARATE OUR REALITY FROM THE OTHERS. AND NOW RAVAN, THROUGH HIS YANTRA FORCE HAS DEVISED MEANS TO ENTER THE OTHER DIMENSIONS... THE ***LOKAS***.

"NOW EVEN YOUR FATHER'S BELOVED ***ARMAGARH*** WILL SHATTER IN FRONT OF THE VILE RAVAN'S MIGHT. FOR HE HAS LEARNT TERRIBLE ***SECRETS*** AND ***ARTS*** FROM THE LOKAS HE HAS BEEN TRAVELING COVERTLY.

"IT IS YOU, ***ONLY YOU*** WHO CAN TURN THE TIDE, FOR YOU ARE OF AN ORIGIN THAT'S NOT OF OUR WORLD.

"YOUR BIRTH WAS A MYSTERY, AND THE VOICES SAY THAT YOU ARE LINKED WITH ONE SUCH LOKA AND A GREAT BEING WHO MASTERS SUCH A REALM.

"HENCE IT IS YOU... ONLY YOU, WHO CAN MATCH THE MIGHT OF LORD RAVAN AND ***BRING DOWN*** HIS REIGN OF TERROR."

*END OF DAYS.

STOP IT. FOR GOD'S SAKE!
WHO ARE YOU? WHY DO YOU UTTER SUCH BLASPHEMIES?
THE VISIONS... THIS IS NO FEAT OF A MERE HEDGE WIZARD... IT'S THE OLD ONE HIMSELF...
HE IS...
I AM THE VISHWAMITRA... OF THE SEVEN SEERS.
YOUR BIRTH WAS A MYSTERY? OF WHAT SORTS? ARE YOU AN ALIEN? I ALWAYS SUSPECTED THAT.
I...I KNEW YOU WERE WEIRD BUT THIS GOES BEYOND ANYTHING!
ENOUGH, STOP THIS NONSENSE!
RAMA, LISTEN TO THE STILLNESS BETWEEN YOUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS, BETWEEN THE PAIN OF YESTERDAY AND THE FEAR OF TOMORROW. YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE SHOWN YOU IS THE TRUTH. SOME MEN ACCEPT FATE, RAMA. OTHERS STAND IN ITS WAY.
I AM RAMA CHANDRA SURYAVANSHI, BORN OF DASHRATH AND KAUSHALYA. I HAVE NO OTHER ORIGIN.

HOURS LATER...
WHO NEEDS HIM ANYWAY? THE FATE OF THE WORLD SHOULD NOT BE LEFT TO SUCH SENTIMENTAL SCIONS. MORE APT FOR ONE WHO'S SURE OF HAND, STRONG OF WILL, AND WITHOUT FEAR. I BELIEVE I KNOW JUST THE MAN.
YOUNG MAN, SUCH BRAVADO IS NO SUCH ASSET ON THE GREAT PLAINS. THERE IS A LOT TO LEARN.
THEN I'LL LEARN. YOU'LL TEACH ME.
YOUR VALOR IS TO BE BOTH ADMIRED... AND FEARED, LAKSHMAN. YOU SPEAK WITH GREAT, YET UNFOUNDED WISDOM.
I MAY NOT HAVE SKIN THE COLOR OF THE GODS, NOR THE NAME CALLED OUT BY THEM. BUT I DO HAVE THE COURAGE TO SERVE THEIR PURPOSE.
EVEN IF IT'S FOR NAUGHT, I WILL END MY DAYS WITH MY WEAPON IN MY GRIP AND THE ENEMY WITHIN MY SIGHT.
I'LL HAVE YOU JOIN ME, BUT ONLY UPON YOUR OATH NEVER TO DEFY ME.
WELL... OKAY... I SWEAR IT!
AS D'I...
MY FIGHT WILL BE FOR NO SUCH IDEALS.
PRAY O' LORDS, AS GREAT AS YE ARE, LET A HUMBLE MAN SERVE YE. ME WISH T' JOIN YE, FER I OWE A LOT TO THE MA'RAJ... ME SHALL FIGHT FO' ARM'GARH AND DIE IF NEED BE.

...FOR I DO NOT BELIEVE IN THEM. NOR DO I BELIEVE IN PROPHECIES OF THE APOCALYPSE OR CHOSEN ONES.
SO WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IN, RAMA?
SURVIVAL.
OFF WE ARE THEN. FIRST, THROUGH THE FORESTS OF DANDAKARANYA.
WHAT? ARE YOU SERIOUS? NEAR JANASTHAN?

YES.
WITHIN THE ASHES OF DESTRUCTION, THERE IS LIFE. HURRY NOW. TIME IS RUNNING SHORT.
TO BE CONTINUED.

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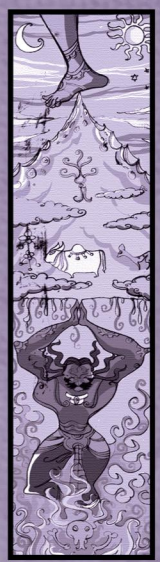
A YEAR HAS PASSED SINCE RAMA'S EXILE FROM ARMAGARH. LAKSHMAN IS ON THE RUN, BETRAYED BY THE COUNCIL AND HIS OWN KIN. IN THE DESERT OF JARA, HE STRUGGLES ONCE MORE WITH KIRAT ASSASSINS--AN ELITE AND SPECIALIZED KILLING FORCE--AND COMES TO REALIZE THAT HIS CHANCES FOR SURVIVAL ARE NAUGHT. HOWEVER, HE IS SAVED BY A MYSTERIOUS MAN KNOWN AS VISHWAMITRA, AND THEY SET OUT TOGETHER IN SEARCH OF RAMA.

IN THE VILLAGE OF THE NISHAAD FISHERMEN, RAMA LEADS A LIFE OF ANONYMITY. HIS TRANQUILITY IS BROKEN UP BY THE ARRIVAL OF VISHWAMITRA AND LAKSHMAN.

AFTER VIGOROUS DEBATE AND A GLIMPSE OF A POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING FUTURE (PROVIDED VIA VISWAMITRA'S POWERS), RAMA SETS OUT WITH THE MOTLEY CREW OF LAKSHMAN, VISHWAMITRA, AND HIS LOYAL FRIEND GUHA ON A JOURNEY THAT WILL DEFINE THEIR COLLECTIVE DESTINY. BUT FIRST THEY HAVE TO GO BACK WHERE IT ALL BEGAN, A GRAVEYARD OF DARK MEMORIES FOR RAMA AND LAKSHMAN: JANASTHAN.



DANDAKARANYA - 5000 YOJANS FROM ARMAGARH.
FOR FIVE WEEKS WE HAVE BEEN TRAVELING. HOW MUCH FURTHER IS THIS MITHILA WE ARE HEADING TOWARDS?
I HAVE A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

TREAD QUIETLY, WE HAVE COME CLOSE TO THE ENEMY TERRITORY.
STOP WHINING AND FOLLOW MY FOOTSTEPS. THIS IS THE SHORTEST ROUTE, AND WE ARE VERY CLOSE.
OF ALL THE PLACES YOU HAD TO BRING US TO...

...JANASTHAN!

JAN'STHAN IS ONE OF THE SETTLEMENTS OF ARM'GARH, AIN'T IT M'LORD?
NOT 'IS,' BUT 'WAS.' YOU CAN SEE MY FRIEND, THAT IT EXISTS NO LONGER.
DID YOUR BELOVED LORD AND FRIEND RAMA TELL YOU THAT TALE, FISHERMAN?
LAKSH... LET'S NOT DO THIS AGAIN. YOU KNOW VERY WELL THAT JANASTHAN WOULD'VE BEEN DESTROYED WHETHER WE FOUGHT TILL THE END OR NOT. THE ASURAS WERE MUCH HEAVIER IN NUMBERS. I DID WHAT I HAD TO TO SAVE THE REMAINING PEOPLE, THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN... AND YOU, LAKSHMAN.
SURRENDER WAS THE RIGHT DECISION.
COWARDICE IS NEVER THE RIGHT DECISION.
YOU BETRAYED ME. YOU BETRAYED ARMAGARH. YOU BETRAYED OUR CODE AND OUR KIND!
THIS COWARD SAVED YOUR HIDE IN THIS VERY PLACE, SO I WON'T MIND TAKING IT NOW.
LIKE BEFORE? BY BEGGING? PLEASE, I DON'T GIVE ALMS.
SPAKK!
HEY...!

HOLD IT, YOU BUFFOONS!
BEFORE YOU KILL EACH OTHER, WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO KNOW WHY JANASTHAN WAS ATTACKED IN THE FIRST PLACE? THE MOST OBSOLETE OF ALL ARMAGARHIAN OUTPOSTS?
DEEP WITHIN THE JUNGLES OF DANDAKARANYA LIES THE LAND OF MITHILA. THE ASURAS ARE SO DESPERATE TO FIND MITHILA BECAUSE WITHIN IT HIDES A MOST PRECIOUS TREASURE. IF LORD RAVAN GETS HIS HANDS ON IT, THEN NO ONE CAN STOP HIM FROM RULING THIS PLANET.
FORT JANASTHAN POSED A THREAT TO THE ASURAS, AND THEY HAD TO DESTROY IT IN ORDER TO KEEP THEIR OPERATIONS IN THE JUNGLE UNDETECTED. ERASING ITS EXISTENCE WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A MEANS TO AN END.
THEY'VE OBLITERATED EVERYTHING. WHEN WE WERE LAST HERE, IT WAS DEEP AND GREEN. NOW I SEE ONLY A CHARRED LAND.
MAYBE LAKSHMAN, YOU WOULD HAVE PREFERRED US AND THE JANASTHANIS TO REMAIN AND BE A PART OF THIS NECROPOLIS.
WHEN THE TWO OF YOU ARE FINISHED SWORD FIGHTING, MIGHT YOU HELP ME GATHER SOME WOOD? I'D BE IMMENSELY GRATEFUL.
WE SHALL CAMP IN THE CLEARING. AN OLD MAN NEEDS HIS TIME FOR SOME SHUT EYE.

LATER.
ZZZZZZZZ...
YOUR FRIEND REEKS OF FISH. ASK HIM TO SLEEP SOMEWHERE ELSE.
IF IT BOTHERS YOU SO MUCH, PERHAPS YOU SHOULD GO SLEEP ELSEWHERE. OR ARE YOU TOO AFRAID TO BE ALL BY YOURSELF?
YOU HAD SOME NERVE... LAYING YOUR HAND ON ME. WE ARE NOT OVER THAT YET.
WHAT DO YOU EXPECT OUT OF ME? AN APOLOGY FOR SAVING YOUR LIFE?
RAMA, YOU ARE...
I'M WHAT?
ENOUGH! TAKE A WALK, BROTHER!
VERY WELL.
SHK...SHK

WHO'S THERE?
SHFF...SHH...
STAY BACK--LET ME SEE. THERE'S SOMETHING ON THE LEDGE.
BY THE GODS...
HOOOT!
'TIS AN OWL. BY VISHNU, THAT'S THE BIGGEST IF I 'AVE EVER SEEN ONE!
W-HOOOT!

<SO YOU SPEAK THE TONGUE OF BIRDS, OLD MAN?>
<THAT, AND MANY OTHERS AS WELL, GOOD MOTHER. TELL ME WHY ARE YOU ALONE IN THIS FRIGID NIGHT? YOU ARE OLD AND YOUR CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAKING CARE OF YOU.>
<ALAS, MY FRIEND... MY LITTLE ONES SURVIVE NO MORE. THE ASURAS KILLED THEM AND EVERYTHING ELSE THAT ONCE THRIVED HERE.>

"<A YEAR AGO, FROM THE SOUTH CAME THE VILE DEMONS, HORDES UPON HORDES OF THEM IN SEARCH OF THE SECRET CITY *MITHILA*.>

"<THE GREAT *BEAST LORDS* LED THEIR ARMIES AND FOUGHT *TOOTH* AND *NAIL* AND *FANG* AND *CLAW* TO KEEP THEM AWAY FROM MITHILA>.

"<NOT THAT WE GAVE WAY EASILY. THE BATTLE WAS FOUGHT *ONCE* AND *TWICE* AND *THREE* TIMES AGAIN.>.

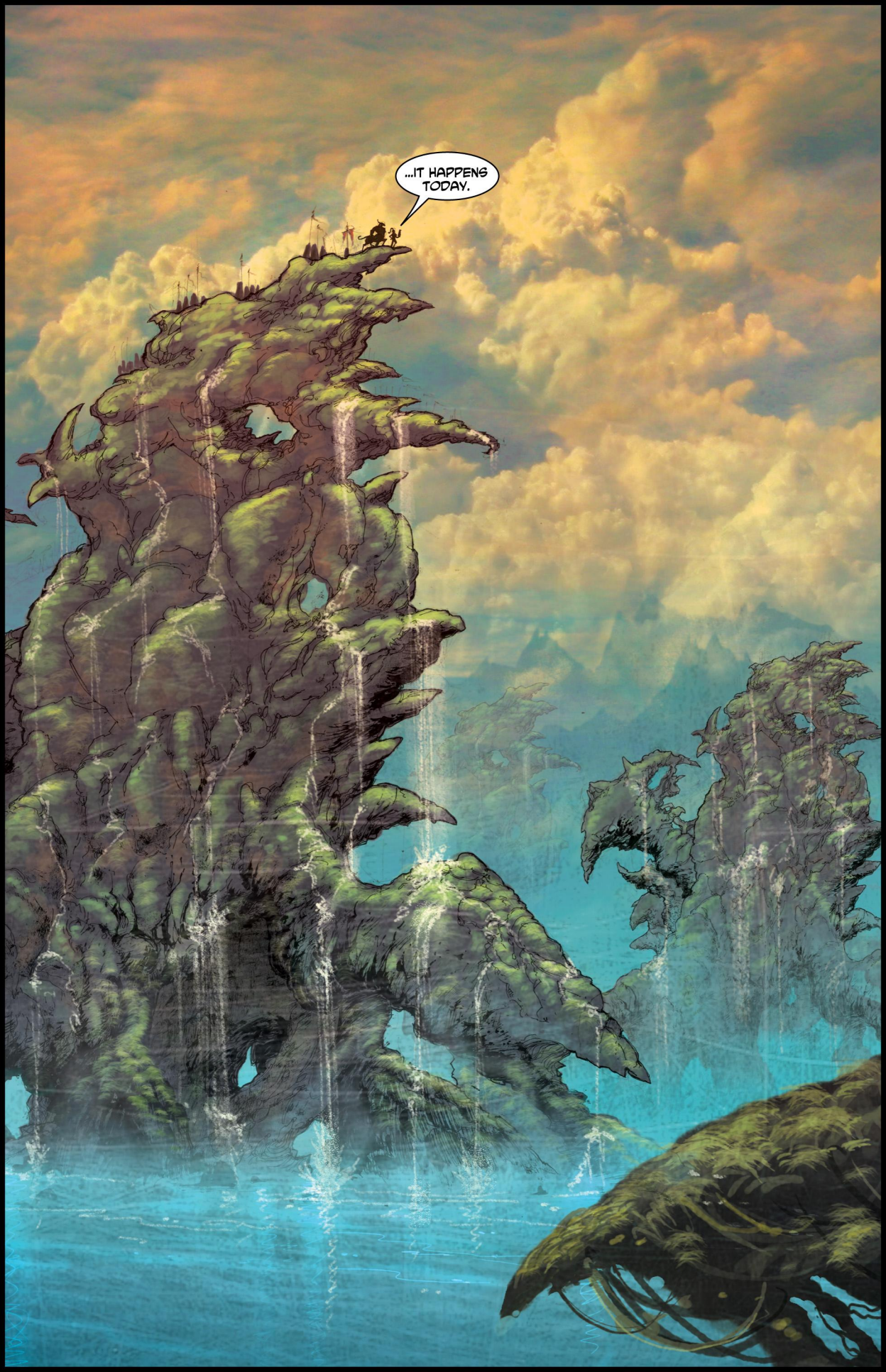
"<BUT WE ARE BEASTS AND BIRDS. THE *GUILE* OF THE ASURAS WAS MORE THAN OUR MATCH>.

"<I LOST MY *TEN SONS* AND *THREE DAUGHTERS* TO THE BATTLE. ALL MY *GRANDCHILDREN* WERE *SLAUGHTERED* EVEN BEFORE THEY HATCHED. ALL FOR NOTHING. WE *LOST* NEVERTHELESS.>."

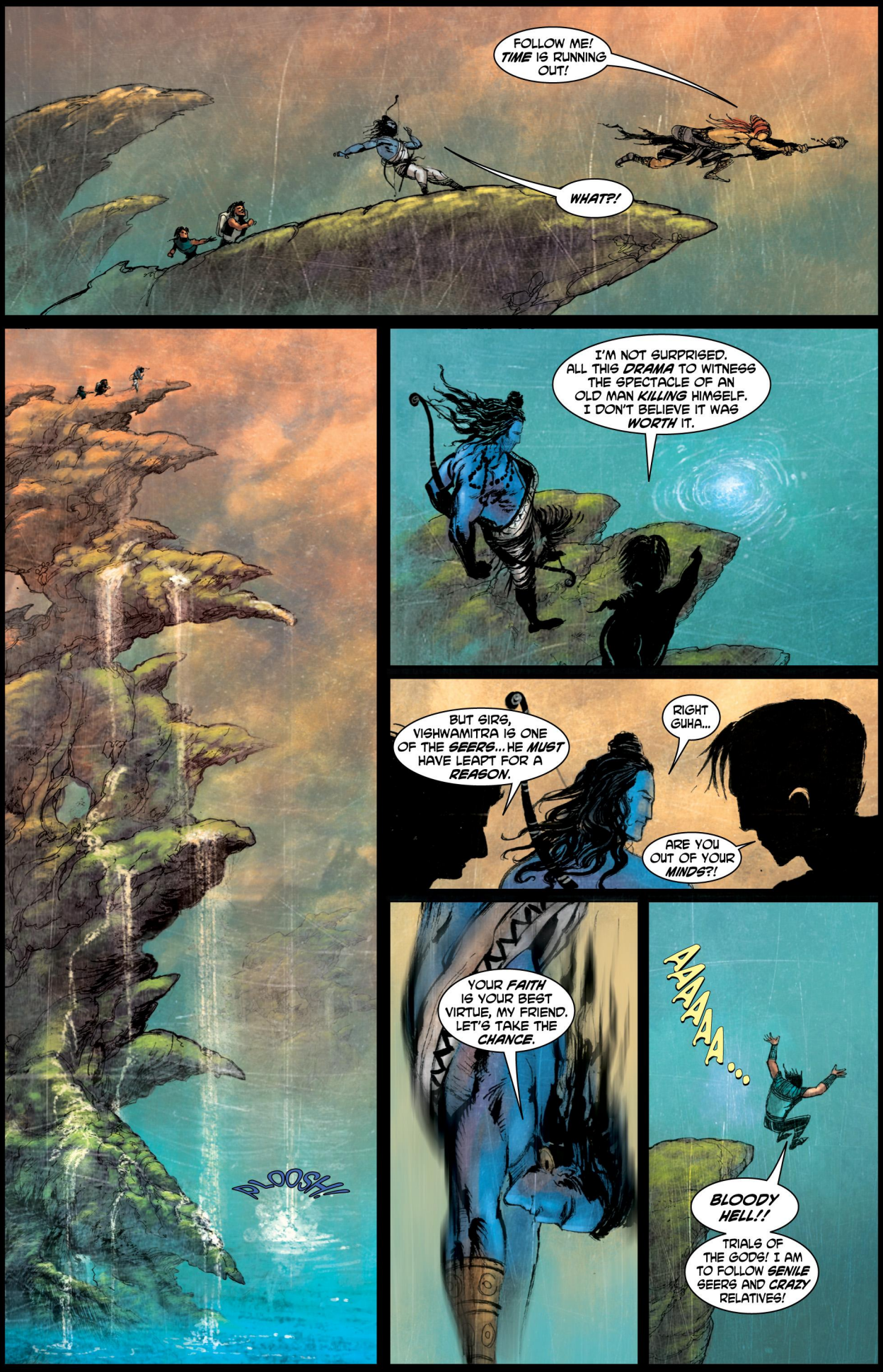
"<BUT WE ARE BEASTS AND BIRDS. THE GUILE OF THE ASURAS WAS MORE THAN OUR MATCH>.
"<I LOST MY TEN SONS AND THREE DAUGHTERS TO THE BATTLE. ALL MY GRANDCHILDREN WERE SLAUGHTERED EVEN BEFORE THEY HATCHED. ALL FOR NOTHING. WE LOST NEVERTHELESS.>."

<ANY CONDOLENCES WILL BE INSIGNIFICANT O' MOTHER. NO PAIN IS GREATER THAN WATCHING YOUR OWN CHILDREN AS THEY EMBRACE DEATH. BUT KNOW THIS, THEY DIED PURE AND FOR A NOBLE CAUSE.>
<TELL ME IF YOU KNOW WHERE WE CAN FIND THE DEMONS FROM THE SOUTH, AND I GIVE MY SOLEMN WORD THAT YOUR LOST PROGENY SHALL BE AVENGED.>
<WITH TWO BOYS AND A FISHERMAN?>
<THAT'S ALL I HAVE. THEY WERE NOT CHOSEN BY ME, BUT BY FORCES BEYOND OUR LIMITED COMPREHENSION.>
ENOUGH OF THIS HYSTERIA AND WHATEVER STRANGE TONGUES YOU SPEAK. FLY AWAY CRAZY OWL!
<FOOLISH BOY!>
<BEWARE O' ANCIENT ONE, YOU ARE SURROUNDED BY FOOLS WHO DON'T ACCEPT THEIR DESTINY.>
<TRAVEL FURTHER WEST AND YOU WILL FIND THE LAST REMAINS OF THE ONCE MIGHTY ASURA FORCE. FEW OF THEM HAVE SURVIVED THE WAR, BUT WHAT'S LEFT OF THEM IS DANGEROUS ENOUGH. RUN FAST! MAY THE NORTH WIND HASTEN YOUR PACE.>
<FOR IT SEEMS THE DEMONS HAVE FINALLY FOUND WHAT THEY DESIRE MOST...>

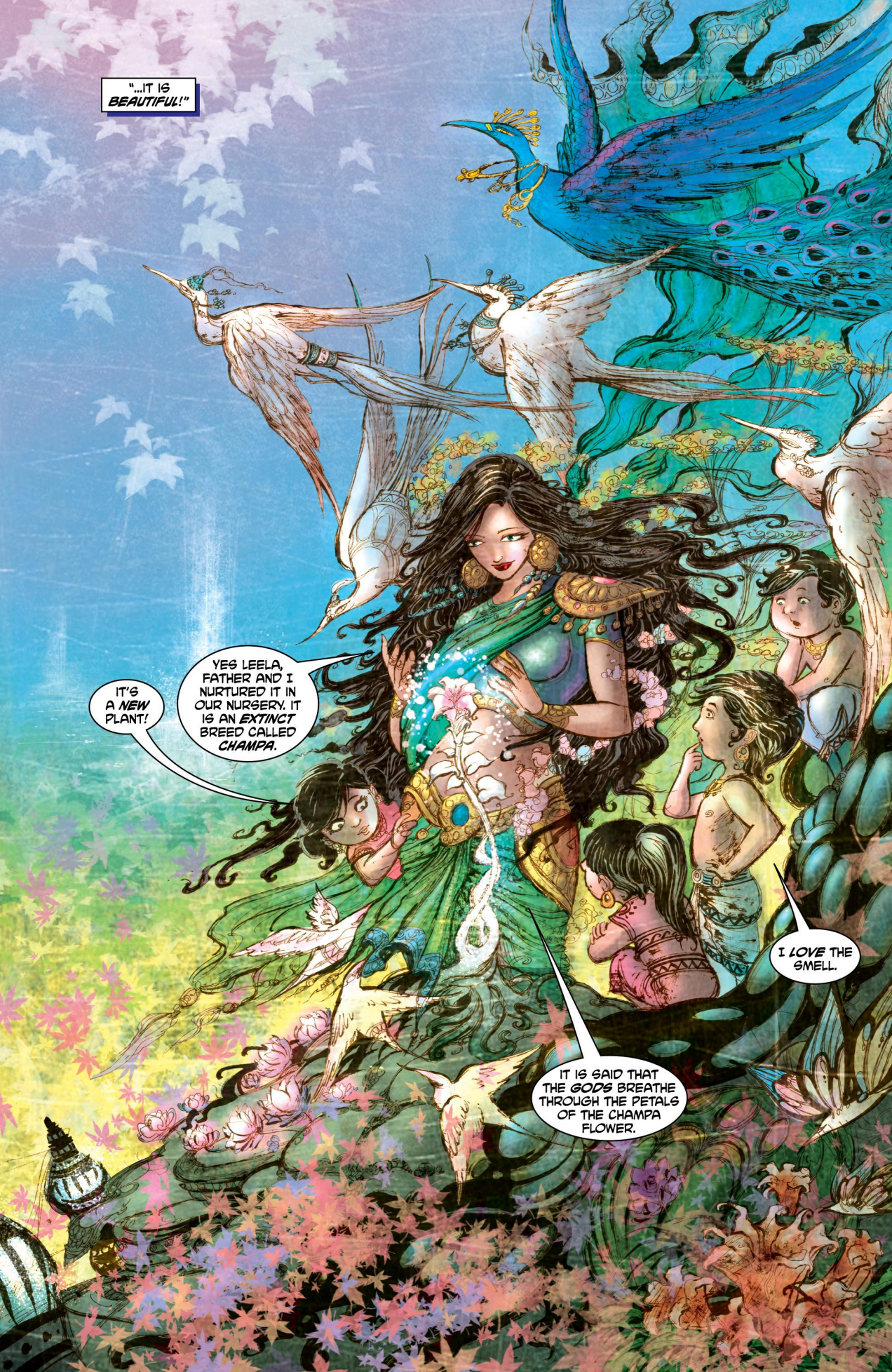
DANDAKARANYA, THE CLIFFS OF GIRID.
AT LAST WE HAVE FOUND IT! NOW IT IS WORTH EVERYTHING. THE REFUSAL OF REINFORCEMENT, THE LOSS OF OUR INFANTRY, AND THE SCARS THAT WE BEAR SO PROUDLY.
FINALLY, I WILL BE GRANTED A PLACE OF HONOR IN THE HALL OF OUR LORD.
BUT MOTHERRRR... WHERE WE VENTURRRRE FORTH IS UNCHARTED TERRITORY. WE KNOW NOT WHAT MITHILANSSS ARE LLLIKE, HOW POWERFUL THEY ARRREE. MIGHT AS WELL CONSSSIDER CALLING BACK UP FOR THIS ONCCCEE.
HUSH BOY! YOU MISERABLE WHINER! IF YOU UTTER ANOTHER STUPID WORD, I'LL CUT YOUR TONGUE OUT, AND GIVE IT TO SUBAHU FOR BREAKFAST.
WE ARE OF THE PROUD GRAKSH CLAN OF LANKA, KIN TO THE LORD HIMSELF. I WILL NEVER SHOW WEAKNESS BY ASKING FOR HELP.
GRRUNT... .MAARICH, COWARD... .MOTHER KILL MITHILANS... . HGGRRRMMM...!
YES, SUBAHU. WE SHALL KILL THEM AND BRING OUR LORD WHAT HE CRAVES. THEN HE SHALL REWARD US HANDSOMELY INDEED.


...IT HAPPENS TODAY.

DANDAKARANYA, NEAR THE CLIFFS OF GIRID.
NOT EVEN A NIGHT'S REST... HUFF... HUFF...
HURRY... HASTE... IF WE DON'T REACH THERE IN TIME, EVERYTHING WILL BE LOST!
FASTER SIR, MASTER LAKSHMAN, THE AGED SEER OUTRUNS US ALL!
HUFF... WHO KNEW THE OLD GOAT CAN SPRINT LIKE A RABBIT!
C'MON BOYS... RUN LIKE KSHATRIYAS. ARMAGARH ONCE MANUFACTURED YOUR KIND ON AN ASSEMBLY LINE. YOU FAIL HER...
I'M AFRAID WE ARE TOO LATE. LISTEN TO THE WAILING OF THE WOODS. MITHILA HAS BEEN INVADED.
THE WOODS ARE WAILING? THAT'S RIDICULOUS!
IS IT TRUE WE ARE HERE BY ORDERS OF AN OWL?


FOLLOW ME! TIME IS RUNNING OUT!
WHAT?!
I'M NOT SURPRISED. ALL THIS DRAMA TO WITNESS THE SPECTACLE OF AN OLD MAN KILLING HIMSELF. I DON'T BELIEVE IT WAS WORTH IT.
BUT SIRS, VISHWAMITRA IS ONE OF THE SEERS... HE MUST HAVE LEAPT FOR A REASON.
RIGHT GUHA...
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MINDS?!
PLOOSH!
YOUR FAITH IS YOUR BEST VIRTUE, MY FRIEND. LET'S TAKE THE CHANCE.
AAAAAA...
BLOODY HELL!!
TRIALS OF THE GODS! I AM TO FOLLOW SENILE SEERS AND CRAZY RELATIVES!

GLBB...GLUGH...
GGLRIGG...
GAAAHHH...!
FRASHAH!
AHHH!
WHAT TH--
BY HEAVENS... IF *THIS* IS *MITHILA*...
IT'S... IT'S...


"...IT IS BEAUTIFUL!"
IT'S A NEW PLANT!
YES LEELA, FATHER AND I NURTURED IT IN OUR NURSERY. IT IS AN EXTINCT BREED CALLED CHAMPA.
I LOVE THE SMELL.
IT IS SAID THAT THE GODS BREATHE THROUGH THE PETALS OF THE CHAMPA FLOWER.

CAN I WEAR IT IN MY HAIR?
RANI, WHEN YOU PLUCK A FLOWER FROM THE EARTH, AND TAKE IT FROM ITS OWN PLACE, ITS FATE IS DOOMED. IT CAN ONLY SURVIVE SO LONG, NO MATTER ITS BEAUTY.
NOW, WE DON'T WANT THAT, DO WE?
OKAY... THEN CAN I WEAR THEM AFTER THEY FALL OFF OF THE TREE?
THAT YOU CAN, I SUPPOSE.
GOOD GOD!
SSSSSRRRRRRRMMMM...
SSSSSRRRRMMMM...
DIDI*, WHAT'S THAT WEIRD NOISE?
I DON'T KNOW. WHAT IS THAT NOISE?
*SISTER
WHAT ARE THESE CREATURES?!
HELP! SOMEONE HELP!
HEEE... HEEEE... SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN!

...TO COME UNTO *FLAMES* AND *FORBID* THEM FROM LIVING, FOR SUCH IS THE *KINGDOM* OF MY LORD.
OH, MY, MY... WHAT A *PRETTY* LITTLE *PLAYTHING* YOU CAN BE FOR MY *LORD*!
UUUNHH!
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? WHO ARE YOU?
TELL ME LITTLE WENCH, WHERE DO YOUR PEOPLE HIDE THE *KEY* TO *MAYA VIDYA*?
MAYA VIDYA... EARTH MAGIC... I KNOW *NOTHING*! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!
NOWWWW THEN, DON'T TRY TO BE *COY* WITH ME....
MY *MASTER* HAS BEEN IN SEARCH OF THIS '*EARTH MAGIC*' FOR AGES!
MOTHERRRRRRR!
WHAT NOW?!

I STILL REMEMBER THE SUFFERING OF JANASTHAN. THE VENOM ALMOST KILLED ME!
NOW FEEL THE POISON OF MY BLADE!
LET'S END WHAT WE STARTED IN JANASTHAN!
GHRRAAIII!
NOOOOO... MY SON!

YOU SHALL PAY FOR THAT!
MONSTER...CHILD KILLER!!
WE SHOULD HAVE DEVOURED YOU ALL BACK IN JANASTHAN! CURSE THAT VIV-SHAN!
GHOUNK!
GAAH!
URGH...DON'T KILL ME...PLEASE!
RAMA!

GRRR... SUBAHU WAS MY FAVORITE SON!
THEN JOIN HIM IN THE PITS OF HELL!
DIEEE...HUMAN!
THWAPP!
AAAARGHH!
NOT TODAY!
RAAAAAA...

GHNNN... CURSE YOU ALL... MUST... MUST...
whup!
NO...!
HANG ON THERE... I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU DIE...
GHHLL... NO... NO, IT'S TOO LATE... MY TIME HAS COME.
DON'T STAND OVER THERE LIKE AN IDIOT. GET SOME OF THOSE GANDHARVA LEAVES. WE MIGHT YET SAVE HER!
YOU ARE... YOU... ARE...
...THE ONE.

HUFF... HHH... WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT HER? WHY DID THAT ASURA TRY TO TAKE HER? IS SHE THE QUEEN OF MITHILA?
I SUPPOSE NOT, MY YOUNG FRIEND.
SHE IS SOMETHING *MUCH* MORE.

"SHE IS THE KEY TO THE SALVATION OF THIS WRETCHED WORLD.
"AND YOUR BROTHER IS SUPPOSED TO BE HER PROTECTOR."
TO BE CONTINUED.